

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
WEST-EASTERN DIVAN

*Whoever knows himself and others
will recognise this too:
Orient and Occident
are no longer to be separated.*

Moganni Nameh
THE BOOK OF THE SINGER

*I let twenty years pass by and
enjoyed what was granted me;
an entire sequence, utterly lovely,
as in the days of the Barmakids.*

†

‡

1

Hegira

North and West and South splinter apart,¹ thrones explode, kingdoms tremble: take flight to the pure East to taste the air of the patriarchs! Amidst loving, drinking, singing, Khidr's spring² will make you young again.

There, in purity and righteousness³ I'll thrust through human generations down to the depths of origin, where they still took heaven's teachings⁴ straight from God, in earthly languages, and didn't wrack their brains.

Where they revered their fathers highly, had no use for foreign ways. I will take my pleasure in the youngest ages: broad the belief, narrow the thought, for the word was so important there because it was a spoken word.⁵

Wenn den Schleyer Liebchen lüftet,
Schüttelnd Ambralocken düftet.
Ja des Dichters Liebeflüstern
Mache selbst die Huris lüstern.

Wolltet ihr ihm dies beneiden,
Oder etwa gar verleiden;
Wisset nur, daß Dichterworte
Um des Paradieses Pforte
Immer leise klopfend schweben,
Sich erbittend ew'ges Leben.

I will rub shoulders with the shepherds, take my ease at oases, when I wander with the caravans, traffic in shawls, coffee, musk; I'll tread every path from the desert to the towns.

Up and down on the awful mountain path, your songs, Hafiz, comfort when the guide in rapture sings from the mule's tall back⁶ to wake up the stars and scare robbers off.

In bath-houses and in taverns, Holy Hafiz,⁷ I'll remember you, when the beloved raises her veil and shaking her amber ringlets suffuses fragrance. Ah, a poet's whispered endearments make even the houris⁸ lust.

If you mean to envy him for this or even spoil his pleasure, keep in mind that a poet's words hover, ever softly knocking, around the gates of Paradise, pleading for eternal life.

A *talisman*⁹ in carnelian brings luck and well-being to believers. If it is set on an onyx base, kiss it with a consecrated mouth! It drives all evil away, protects you and protects the place. If the word incised upon it clearly proclaims Allah's name, it fires you up to love and deed. Women especially take delight in the talisman.

*Amulets*¹⁰ such as these are written signs on paper; and yet there is not the same crowding as on the precious stones' narrow span, and pious souls may choose longer verses here. Men hang these papers devoutly around their necks as scapulars.

The *inscription*, however, has nothing behind it. It is itself and must say all to you. But what lies behind it is what you love saying with a fervent satisfaction: It is I who say it! I!

But I seldom summon *Abraxas*!¹¹ This must be the most grotesque thing that benighted madness has created to apply to the All-Highest. If I say nonsensical things to you, consider that I'm summoning Abraxas.



A *signet-ring*¹² is hard to inscribe: the highest meaning in the strictest space. Yet here you can turn something authentic to your use. The word remains engraved; you barely think of it.

3

*Openmindedness*¹³

Let me be reckoned only in my saddle!¹⁴ Stay in your huts and your tents! I ride out freely in all distant directions, with only the stars over my cap.



He has set the stars for you as guides¹⁵ over land and sea; so that you may be delighted in them, gazing always into the heights.



Ob ich Ird'sches[†]

4

*Talismans*¹⁶

To God belongs the Orient! To God belongs the Occident! Northern and southern lands rest in the peace of His hands.¹⁷

He, the only Just One, wants what is right for everyone. May this among His hundred¹⁸ names be praised to the skies! Amen.

Going astray¹⁹ perplexes me but You know how to remove my confusion. When I act, when I write, give my path the right direction.

Whether I think and reflect on earthly things, that leads to a higher yield. The spirit, not pulverised with the dust, thrusts, compacted within itself, to what is on high.

In breathing²⁰ there are two sorts of grace: to draw air within, to unburden yourself of it; the one oppresses, the other sets free; so wondrously is life intertwined. You thank God²¹ when He hems you in and you thank Him again when He lets you go.

*Four Graces*²²

Since Arabs for their part roam gladly far and wide, God has accorded them four graces for their common good.

First, the turban that embellishes better than any monarch's crown; a tent that can move from place to place so they can dwell anywhere.

A sword that protects more effectively than a cliff and high walls; a song that is both pleasing and useful, which young girls wait eagerly to hear.

And flowers I sing, unruffled by her shawl;²³ she knows very well what becomes her, and for me she stays lively and gracious.

I can regale you festively with flowers and fruits; if you want moral lessons²⁴ too, I'll provide you with the freshest.

Confession

What is hard to hide? Fire! By day its smoke betrays it, by night, its flame, that monster-colossus! But even harder to hide is love: however fostered in silence, it yet leaps plainly out of the eyes. Hardest to hide is a poem: it can't be hidden under a bushel. If the poet has just sung it, he is totally steeped in it; if he has written it quite prettily, he wants the whole wide world to love it. He declaims it happily and loudly to everybody, whether it tortures or edifies us.

*Elemente**

Aus wie vielen Elementen
Soll ein ächtes Lied sich nähren?

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7

*Elements*²⁵

Out of how many elements should a genuine song be fed, so that ordinary people enjoy it and masters hear it with joy?

Let love above all things be our theme when we sing; if it can penetrate the song, it will sound all the better.

Then the clink of glasses must ring out and the ruby of the wine shine forth: since for lovers, for drinkers, one signals with the loveliest wreaths.

Clang of weapons is also required and that the trumpet sound as well; so that when fortune blazes up, the hero in his victory may be idolised.

Last, it is unavoidable that the poet hate many a thing; and not let what's ill-favoured and ugly live on as though it were beautiful.

If a singer can mix together this fourfold primeval and powerful stuff, like Hafiz²⁶ he will forever gladden and refresh the people.

*Creating and Enlivening*²⁷

Hans Adam was a clod of earth God made into a man; but out of his mother's womb he brought much that was rough and bulky.

Elohim blew the finest spirit into his nostrils and now he seemed to improve for he began to sneeze.

Yet with his bones and limbs and head he was still little more than a clump until Noah²⁸ found what was right for a swig: the tankard.

At once the clod felt a spurt as soon as he wet his whistle, just as dough is stirred into life by fermentation.

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Just so, Hafiz, may your genial song, your sacrosanct example, lead us with the clink of glasses,²⁹ to our Creator's temple.

Conflict

When on the left at the edge of the brook Cupid plays his flute, on the right hand in the field Mars sounds his trumpet, the ear is lovingly drawn thereby and yet, is betrayed by the noise of the song on display. It flutes on ever full in the thunder of war. I grow raving mad – is that any wonder? The sound of the flute grows stronger, the blare of the trumpets, I am dazed, I rave on – is that an astonishment?

Phenomenon

When Phoebus³⁰ weds the wall of the rain, a rainbow appears, gaudily enshadowed.

I see myself drawn into the same circle's mist; true, the rainbow is white and yet it is heaven's bow.

So, frisky old man, you shouldn't give way to grief. Your hair may be white but you will still love.

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*Lovable*³¹

What bright vivid thing there binds heaven with the heights for me? Morning mistiness blinds the sharp sight of my gaze.

Are they the tents of a vizier³² who built them for beloved women? Are they festive carpets entrusted to the best beloved?

Red and white, entangled, speckled – nothing lovelier can I gaze upon. But, Hafiz, how is it that your Shiraz³³ comes to the gloomy regions of the north?

Ah yes, they are bright poppies that companionably spread out and, scornful of the god of war, cover the fields in amiable streaks.

May the wise man ever cultivate blossom-adornments that benefit, and may the sunshine, like today, light them up along my way!

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12

The Past in the Present

Rose and lily bedewed by the morning bloom in the garden near me; further back, snug and thicketed, the cliff mounts up to the heights; and encircled by the high wood and crowned with a knight's castle, the arch of the peak connects until it is reconciled with the valley.

And there the scent is as it was in the past, when we suffered still from love and when the strings of my psaltery³⁴ contended with the morning sunbeams; when the hunting call from the thickets breathed out the fullness of its rounded tones, to fire us up, to freshen us, how the breast wanted and needed it.

Now the forests send up their shoots everlastingly, and so be emboldened by this; what once you delighted in for yourselves can be savoured in others' delight. No one will reprove us then that we took pleasure for ourselves alone; now you must be able to delight in all the ranges of life.

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And with this song and turn we are with Hafiz again. For it is fitting when the day is done to revel with the revellers.

13

*Song and Shape*³⁵

Let the Greek press his clay into shapes, let the son of his own hands heighten his ecstasy;

But for us it is a joy to grip the Euphrates and to roam back and forth in the flowing element.

If then I extinguish the soul's blaze, Song, it will still ring out; when the poet's pure hand scoops it up, water itself forms a ball.

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14

Boldness

How does it happen that everywhere man becomes whole again? Everyone loves to hear the sound that shapes itself to a tune.

Away with everything that troubles your course! Anything but gloomy striving! Before he sings, before he ceases, the poet must live.

So may life's brazen clang roar through the soul! Should the poet feel dread in his heart, he will find reconciliation within himself.

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15

Coarse and yet Fine

Poetry is boisterousness, let nobody scold me for that! Be of good hope in your own hot blood, happy and free, like me.

If each hour's agony had a bitter taste for me, I'd be modest too, and even more modest than she.

For modesty is fine and good when a young girl's in bloom; she who runs from roughnecks will be wooed with tenderness.

Modesty is good as well, a wise man says, who can teach me of time and eternity.

Poetry is boisterousness! I prefer to pursue it alone. But you friends and you women, bring your fresh blood to it too!

Little monk lacking cap and cowl, don't babble on at me! You're really driving me nuts – not modest, no!

The empty guff of your gibberish chases me away, I've already wiped it off of my shoes.

When the poet's mill is spinning, don't make it stop: for whoever understands us just once will pardon us too.

16

*All Life*³⁶

Dust is one of the elements that you so deftly subdue, Hafiz, when you sing a delicate song to honour the beloved.

For the dust of her threshold is preferable to the carpet upon whose gold-wrought flowers Mahmud's³⁷ favourites kneel.

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When the wind drives the dust-clouds nimbly by her door, the fragrances are dearer to you than musk or rose oil.

I have long since dispensed with dust in the ever-shrouded North; but in the hot South it has become quite sufficient for me.

Yet how long has it been since beloved doors grew still on their hinges for me! Heal me, storm-rain,³⁸ let me smell how it all turns green!

If now all thunder rolls and lights up the whole heaven, the wild dust on the wind will come down to the dampened ground.

And at once life springs up, a secret and holy working swells up, and it smells of green and it turns all green in the regions of the earth.

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*Holy Longing*³⁹

Tell it to no one except for the wise, for the rabble will scorn it at once. I will praise the living being that longs for death in flame.

In the cool of nights of love, which begot you, where you begot, strange sensation comes upon you when the silent candle shines.

You will no longer be enveloped in the shadowing of the dark, and a desire seizes you anew to rise to a higher consummation.

No distance deters you, you come flying and spellbound, and at last, greedy for the light,⁴⁰ Butterfly,⁴¹ you are burnt up.



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And as long as you do not possess this – this: Die and Become!⁴² You are nothing but a dreary guest on the dark earth.



A reed ventured forth to sweeten worlds! May whatever is charming and lovable flow out of my reed-pen.⁴³

Hafis Nameh
THE BOOK OF HAFIZ

*Let the word be called the bride,
the spirit the bridegroom;
whoever praises Hafiz has known these
nuptials.*

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18

*Pen-Name*¹

POET Muhammad Shams al-Din, say, why have your people, that noble folk, named you *Hafiz*?

HAFIZ I honour your question and reply to it. Because I preserve in glad memory the sanctified legacy of the Qur'an² without any alteration and so reverently bring it forth that the miseries of the quotidian afflict neither me nor those who treasure the Prophet's word and seed, as is fitting – this is why I was given the name.

POET Because of this, Hafiz, so it appears to me, I would not gladly draw apart from you: for if we think as others do, we come to be like others. And so I am like you utterly for I have taken within myself from our own sacred books³ that splendid image of the Lord's likeness that was impressed upon that shroud of shrouds, quickening me in my silent breast, despite denial or oppression's theft,⁴ with the serene image of belief.

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19

Lament

Do you know then whom the devils spy upon in the desert,⁵ between cliff and walls? And how they await the moment to seize and lead them off to hell? Liars are they and the evil spirit.

Why does the poet not shrink from allowing such people in!

Does he even know with whom he walks and rambles? He who always traffics only in madness. Boundless, he is driven by stiff-necked love into the wasteland, the rhymes of his lament, written on the sand, are swept away at once by the wind; he does not understand what he says, he does not abide by what he says.⁶

And yet, his song is allowed to prevail forever, despite the fact that indeed it contradicts the Qur'an. O you experts in the Law, pious in your wisdom, deeply learned men, teach faithful Muslims their bounden duty.

Hafiz in particular concocts vexations,⁷ Mirza⁸ detonates the mind into uncertainty: Say what one must do and not do.

Fatwa

In his poetic effects Hafiz delineates perfected truth inexhaustibly; and yet, now and then there are trifles that go beyond the limits of the Law. If you would proceed surely, you have to know how to distinguish between the venom of the snake and its antidote. But to surrender oneself with blithe mind to a pure delight in noble dealing, and with well-considered reflection to guard yourself against those who only pursue eternal pain, is certainly what's best so as not to err. The wretched Abu Su'ud⁹ wrote this for you. May God forgive him all his sins.

The German Gives Thanks

Holy Abu Su'ud, you've hit the mark! The poet always wishes for such holy men; for just those very trifles, outside the limits of the Law, are the legacy by which he in high spirits, merry even in sorrow, operates. Snake venom and its antidote must one and the other seem the same to him. That one will not kill, this other will not heal. For true life is the everlasting innocence of action that reveals itself in such a way that it harms no one but itself. And so the old poet can hope that in paradise the houris will receive him as a transfigured youth. Holy Abu Su'ud, you've hit the mark!

Fetwa

The Mufti read Misri's¹⁰ poems, one after the other, all together, and after full consideration tossed them into the flames. The beautifully written book was annihilated.

May everyone, the high judge¹¹ spoke, be burned to death who speaks and believes like Misri – but may he alone be exempted from the agony of the Fire¹²: for it was Allah who gave that poet his gift.¹³ If he misused it in the turmoil of his sins, so let him see to it to find his peace with God.

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Unbounded

What makes you great is that you cannot end, and that you never begin, that is your destiny. Your song is spinning like the starry vault, beginning and end everlastingly the same, and what the midpoint brings is manifestly what remains at the end and in the beginning ever was.¹⁴

You are the poet's true source¹⁵ of joys, and wave upon wave flows from you beyond count. A mouth always primed to kiss, a song from the breast that flows in loveliness, a maw¹⁶ ever aroused to drink, a kindly heart that pours itself out.

And, Hafiz, though the whole world go under, with you, with you alone, will I strive to compete! Let pleasure and pain be held in common for us, twins that we are! Like you to love and to drink shall be my pride, my life.

Now, Song, ring out with your very own fire! For you are older, you are newer.¹⁷

Imitation

In the art of your rhymes I hope to find myself, repetition¹⁸ shall be my pleasure too; first I'll find the sense and then I will find the words; on a second try no echo will sound for me, it has to establish the specific sense, as you do, most gifted of all!

Then, like the spark that can kindle the imperial city¹⁹ when the flames rage furiously, and engendered by the wind glow in their own hot drafts, and the spark, long extinguished, disappears in the great halls of the stars: so it spirals on from you, with eternal glow, to fire up a German heart afresh.

It's true that measured cadences can charm, and talent takes keen pleasure in them; and yet, how quickly they turn tiresome and repel, hollow masks²⁰ that lack both blood and sense. The mind seems not to enjoy itself when, set on new form, it doesn't put an end to such dead form.

25

Open Secret

Holy Hafiz, they have called you the mystical tongue²¹ but those men so learned in words haven't recognised the value of the word.

For them you are called mystical because they think foolish things of you and pass their illicit wine around in your name.

But you are mystically pure because they do not understand you – you who without being pious, are blessed!²² They will never concede you that.

26

Hint

And yet, those whom I scold are right: That a word not simply be valid, that must be understood of itself. The word is a fan! Between its pleats a pair of lovely eyes gazes out. The fan is only the thinnest veil. True, it hides her face from me and yet, it does not conceal the girl. For the loveliest thing she owns – her eye – flashes upon my eye.

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*To Hafiz*²³

You already know what everyone wants and have understood it well: for longing²⁴ holds us all, from the dust-speck to the throne, in mighty bonds.

It hurts so and yet afterwards it is good, who can struggle against it? If one breaks his neck, another remains emboldened.

Pardon, Master, as you know that often I presume when she tears her eyes away, that strolling cypress.²⁵

Like root-tendrils her foot creeps on and forms liaisons with the ground; like light cloud her greeting melts, like the east wind her breath.

That all urges us mysteriously where lock²⁶ upon lock is tousled, swells up curling in brown profusion, then murmurs in the wind.

*

Now the brow opens up in its clarity to soothe your heart, you hear a song so glad and true, you lay your mind down in it.

And when lips move in the most fetching way they set you free at once to lay yourself in shackles down.

The breath will return no more, soul fleeing to soul, scents coil themselves through the happiness, invisibly cloudily drawing.²⁷

But when all-consumingly it burns, then you reach for the cup; the cup-bearer²⁸ runs, the cup-bearer comes for a first and a second time.

His eye flashes, his heart trembles. He is hoping for instruction²⁹ from you, to hear you when wine exalts your mind to its sublimest sense.

For him the space of the worlds falls open. Salvation and order deep within, his breast swells, his down³⁰ darkens, he has become a young man.

And if you have no secret left that encompasses heart and world, you offer hints³¹ both true and fond so that the meaning may unfold.

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So, too, that the princely hoard from the throne may not be lost to us, give the Shah³² a goodly word, and give the vizier one too.

All this you know and you sing it today, and you'll sing it again tomorrow. So may your friendship companion us through life both rough and genial.

Uschk Nameh
THE BOOK OF LOVE

*Tell me, what your heart
desires? My heart is with
you, hold it dear.[†]*

28

Exemplary Images

Hear and hold close six pairs of lovers. Word-image¹ enflames, love stokes it: Rustam and Rudaba.² Unknown to each other, they are close: Yusuf and Suleika.³ Love, not love's reward: Farhad and Shirin.⁴ Only there for one another: Majnun and Layla.⁵ Loving in age Jamil glimpsed Buthaynah.⁶ Sweet moods of love: Solomon and the Dark One!⁷ If you've marked these well, you are made strong in your love.

Another Couple

Yes! Love is a great accomplishment! Who can discover a lovelier gain? – You won't become mighty, you won't get rich, but you'll be like the greatest heroes. One should speak of *Wamiq*⁸ and of *Asra* in the same way one speaks well of the Prophet. – But we won't just talk, we will name them. All must know the names. What they did, what they carried out, nobody knows! That they loved, that's what we know. Enough said! If anyone asks about Wamiq and Asra.

*Reader*⁹

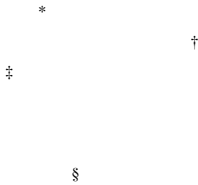
The most wonderful book of all books is the book of love; I've read it attentively: a few pages of joy, entire fascicles of suffering; 'Separation' forms one chapter. 'See you again!' a tiny chapter, a fragmentary one. Tomes of anxiety lengthened by annotations, unending, beyond all measure. O Nizami!¹⁰ – still, by the end you've found the right way. Who could ever unravel this tangle? Lovers who find each other again.

Yes, the eyes it was! Yes, the mouth, that looked at me, that kissed me. Slender the hips, the body so rounded, as though for pleasures of paradise. Was she there? Where has she gone? Yes, it was she, she gave herself, gave herself in flight and shackled my whole life.

*Warned*¹²

I have myself all too willingly become entangled in locks of hair, and so, Hafiz, it would be for your friend as it was for you. But now they wind braids out of their long hair, they fight as though wearing helmets, as we both know well from experience.

But whoever reflects well doesn't let himself be so compelled: you fear heavy chains but stumble into flimsy snares.

*Immersed*¹³

So round a head full of curly ringlets! And if I may roam with full hands back and forth in such rich hair, I feel whole and healed in the depth of my heart. And when I kiss brow, eyebrows, eye, mouth, then I am fresh and wounded all over again. How should the five-toothed comb ever snag? It returns to the ringlets again. Nor does the ear deny itself the game, here is not flesh, here is not skin, so tender to frivolity, so love-abundant! Yet just as one lovingly tousles the head, so may he forever ramble up and down in such rich hair. Just as you too, Hafiz, have done, we start from the beginning all over again.

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34

*Dubious*¹⁴

Shall I speak of the emerald¹⁵ that your finger coyly sports? Sometimes a word is requisite. Often it's better to keep still.

And so I say that the colour is green and refreshes the eye! Don't say that sorrow and scar stand close at hand to be feared.

And yet! You may read it! Why do you exert such force! 'Your being is as dangerous as the emerald is restorative.'

35

Ah, Darling! The free songs that once flitted joyously back and forth in the pristine realm of the heavens are pressed into rigid confines.¹⁶ Time corrupts everything, they alone remain fresh! Every line should be deathless, eternal as love itself is.

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36

False Comfort

At midnight I was weeping and sobbing, because I was bereft of you. Then night-spirits arrived and I was ashamed. Night-spirits, I said, you find me here sobbing and weeping, I whom you used to pass over while asleep. I am missing great good things. Don't think worse of me whom you once called wise. A great evil has afflicted him! And the night-spirits with long faces passed by, utterly unconcerned as to whether I was wise or foolish.¹⁷

37

*Content*¹⁸

'How wrongly you assume that the girl is yours out of love. That couldn't make me happy at all; she's concerned only with flirtatious flattery.'

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*Greeting*¹⁹

O how blessed it was for me! I wandered in the countryside where *Hudhud*²⁰ ran along the path. From the ancient sea's shells I searched for those that were petrified; Hudhud ran about, unfurling his crown-crest, in a swaggering, frivolous way, cracking jokes about the dead, the living. Hudhud, I said, Really! You're one fine bird. Hurry up, Hoopoe! Hurry to announce to my beloved that I am hers for ever. As you once played the matchmaker between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba!



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*Resignation*²¹

'You pass by and are so friendly, do you consume yourself yet sing so beautifully?'

POET Love treats me with hostility! So I will be glad to admit: I sing with a heavy heart. Just take a look at candles, they glow as they go under.



Love's sorrow sought out a place where it would be lonely and desolate; it then discovered my heart laid waste and made a nest for itself in that empty place.

40

Unavoidable

Who can command the birds to be still in the field?²² And who can prohibit the sheep from squirming under the shear?

Do I set myself up as unruly when my wool springs out? No! The shearer²³ who tousles me compels me to unruliness.

Who could prevent me from singing with joy to heaven on high, to confide in the clouds, how lovingly she has treated me?

41

*Secret*²⁴

Everybody stands bedazzled by my sweetheart's shy side-long glances. By contrast, I, who am in the know, know very well what that signifies.

For it means: I love this one, and not that one or the other. You good people, leave off your amazement, your yearning.

*

Yes, with enormous powers she shoots her glance all around; and yet, she is only seeking to alert him to the next sweet hour.

42

*Most Secret*²⁵

‘We are dying to track down – we hunters of anecdotes – who your sweetheart may be and whether you might not also have a lot of rivals.’²⁶

For we see that you’re in love, and are glad to see it granted you; still, that a sweetheart might love you so we really can’t manage to believe.’

Dear Sirs, without hindrance seek her out! But just heed one thing: You’ll take fright when she appears; when she’s gone you’ll taste her semblance.

You know how Shihab al-Din²⁷ stripped off his cloak at Arafat.²⁸ No one will think you fools if you act in his way.

If ever your name be spoken before the imperial throne or before the dearly beloved, may it be to your highest praise.

Just so, there was the loudest lamentation when dying Majnun²⁹ expressed the wish that his name never afterward be spoken before Layla.

Tefkir Nameh

BUCH DER BETRACHTUNGEN



Tefkir Nameh
THE BOOK OF REFLECTIONS*

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43

Hear the advice that the lyre sounds out; and yet, it's of use only if you're capable. The most felicitous word will be scorned if the hearer has an untrustworthy ear.

'What does the lyre sound out?' It sounds out loudly: The loveliest is not the best bride; still, if we should count you one of us, then you must wish for the loveliest, the best.

44

Five Things

Five things do not bring five about; you, open your ear up to this teaching: Friendship will never sprout from a vainglorious heart; the companions of baseness are unmannerly; a good-for-nothing can never achieve greatness; the envious man has no compassion for nakedness; the liar hopes in vain for faithfulness and belief – hold fast to this and nobody can despoil you.

45

Five Others

What shortens time for me? Activity!
What makes it unbearably long? Idleness!
What brings blame? Procrastination and long-suffering!
What produces gains? Not pondering over-much!
What leads to honour? Resistance!

46

The young girl's glance, when she signals, is precious, the drinker's glance, before he drinks, is precious, as is the greeting of the ruler who can command, the sunshine in autumn that shines down on you. But keep in sight, more precious than all of these, how a hand in need so prettily presses even a little gift to itself, how exquisitely thankful it accepts what you hold out. What a glance! What a greeting! What an expressive effort! See it rightly and you will always give.

47

And what stands written in the *Pand-nameh*¹ comes to you from the heart: everyone to whom you give yourself, you will come to love as yourself. Give your penny happily, don't pile up a legacy of gold, make haste joyously to prefer the present to its memory.

48

You ride past a blacksmith but you don't know when he may shoe your horse; you see a vacant hut in the field, but don't know whether it harbours a beloved for you; you encounter a young man, handsome and bold, someday he may overcome you or you him; the surest thing you can say of the vine is that it will bear something good for you. In this way are you then commended to the world; the rest I won't reiterate.

49

Honour the greeting of the unknown man! It will be as precious to you as an old friend's salutation. After few words you say Farewell! You head for the East, he to the West, path upon path – should your paths cross once again after many years unexpectedly, greet each other joyously: It is he! It was there! As if so many journeys over land and sea, so many returning suns, had not occurred. Now trade goods for goods, share the profit! An old trustworthiness effects a new bond – the first greeting is worth many a thousand; and so give a friendly greeting to everyone who greets you.

50²

They've always had a lot to say about your failings, and to recount them rightly, they have troubled themselves mightily. Had they told of your good points in a friendly way, with clear and honest pointers as to how one goes about choosing what is better, O for sure the best of all would not have been hidden from me, that best that counts only a few guests in its confraternity, and now to come to me as if to a pupil, at last singled out. And piety instructs me in repentance when the man himself goes wrong.

51

Markets stimulate you to buy; but knowledge is puffed up. Whoever gazes about himself in stillness learns how love edifies. If you are studious by day and by night, much to hear and much to know: listen at another door how it is most fitting to know. Should the good be within you, feel what the good is in God: whoever blazes up in pure love. will be acknowledged by the loving God.³

52

When I was so very honest I went wrong and for years I went about tormenting myself; I was worthy and yet unworthy as well; how was that possible? I resolved then to be a good-for-nothing and went at it energetically; that didn't suit me either, and I had to lacerate myself. Then I thought: to be honest is still the best; even if it's of small account, yet it still holds fast.

*

53

Don't ask by which gate you came into God's city but stay in the silent place where you once found a space.

Then gaze around for the wise and for the powerful who give commands; the former will instruct you, the latter steel you in act and strength.

If you are useful and serene, remain true to the state, then know: no one will hate you, and many will love you.

And the prince will acknowledge your fidelity, your deeds will keep it alive; so then the new will also be protected as something lasting alongside the old.

*

54

Where did I come from? This is still a question, my way here is scarcely known to me; today, right here, on a day when the heavens are glad, grief and delight come together as friends. O sweet felicity, when these two are as one! Who would wish to laugh, who would wish to weep, all alone?⁴

55

One goes hence after another, and sometimes too before the other; so let us walk on life's pathways intrepidly, bravely and boldly. It holds you up when you glance aside to pluck the flowers; and yet, nothing more fatally holds you back than if you have been false.⁵

56

Be gentle in dealing with women! They were created from a crooked rib. God couldn't make it quite straight. If you bend it, it breaks; if you leave it be, it gets even crookeder. O good Adam, which of these is worse? Be careful in dealing with women: it isn't good to break a rib of your own.

57

Life is a bad joke: this one lacks that, that one lacks this, this one doesn't want less, that one wants too much, and luck and ability come also into play. And if misfortune is mixed in too, each man bears it even unwillingly. Until at the end the heirs show up to carry Mr Cannot-Willnot gleefully away.

58

Life is a 'goose-game':⁶ the farther forward you move the quicker you come to the goal where no one wants to stop.

They say that geese are stupid; O don't give credence to such people: for sometimes a goose looks around to tell me to move back.

In this world it goes quite otherwise where everything presses forward: if someone stumbles or falls, not a single soul looks back.

59

'The years, you say, have taken so much from you: the lively pleasure in the senses' play, remembrance of the all-precious fripperies of yesterday, the roaming through lands far and wide that no longer satisfies; not even the cherished adornment of honour from on high, the acclamation, once so delightful. No satisfaction bubbles up from your own deeds, you are lacking in audacious daring! Now I don't even know whether anything remains for you at all.'

Enough remains for me! Love remains, and the idea!

60

To set yourself in the presence of those who know is the surest thing in every case! If you have been long troubled he will know at once where you've gone astray; you may even hope for applause since he knows when you have hit the mark.⁷

61

The generous is deceived, the miser is divested, the intelligent is misled, the reasonable drawn into the void, the rigid man is circumvented, the fool is ensnared. Master these lies, deceived, turn deceiver!

62

He who can command will praise and he will also scold at times; and that must you, you faithful servant, take, one with the other.

For he may praise the trivial, may scold when he ought to praise; but if you remain well disposed, he will also reckon you at your true worth.

And you, you Lofty Ones, behave yourselves towards God as the little man does: act and suffer things as they are, while remaining always well disposed.

63

To Shah Shuja' and his Counterparts

Through all the roar and clang of the Transoxanian troops, our song makes bold along your ways! We are afraid of nothing, in you we live; may your life be long, may your reign endure forever!⁸

64

Highest Favour

Untamed, as I was then, I found a master and, tamed, after many a year, I found a mistress too. When they were sorely put to the test, they found me to be true and they kept me with care as the treasure that they had found. No one served two masters who has found his happiness therein. Master and mistress are glad to see that both of them have found me; and for me my felicity and my star have shone since I found them both.⁹

65

Firdowsi Speaks

'O world! how shameless and wicked you are! You nourish and rear us and kill at once.'¹⁰

Only he whom Allah has favoured is nourished and reared, living and rich.

What then does wealth mean? A beggar enjoys the sun that warms him just as we do! So let none of the wealthy despise the blessed delight of the beggar in his own innermost way.

66

*Jalal al-Din Rumi Speaks*¹¹

If you linger in the world it flees like a dream; you travel but destiny decrees the space; you cannot retain either heat or cold, and whatever flowers for you withers away at once.

67

*Suleika Speaks*¹²

The mirror says to me: I am beautiful! You say: To grow old will be your fate as well. Before God everything must stand eternally, love Him in me for this instant.

Rendsch Nameh
THE BOOK OF ILL-HUMOUR

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†

68

‘Where did you get this? How could it come to you? How did you get this tinder out of life’s plunder, to revive the final glimmer of the spark afresh?’

It ought not be obscure to you, it is a glimmering common to everyone; at immeasurable distance, in the ocean of the stars, I did not lose myself; I was as though newborn.

From the surge of white sheep enveloping the hill, tended by serious shepherds who take pleasure in offering modest hospitality, such peaceful loving folk, each one of whom delights me.

In nights of shuddering, menaced by war, the groaning of the camels shot through the ear and the soul, through the imagination and the swagger, of those who led them.

And always it went further, always it grew broader, and all our dragging effort seemed an eternal flight from the pitched battle of illusory seas,¹ blue, behind the wasteland and the troops.

69

No rhymester can be found, who doesn't think himself the best; no fiddler who'd not rather play his own melodies.
And I really couldn't fault them; if we honour others, must we deprecate ourselves? Do we then live if others do?
And this is just what I found to be true in certain antechambers² where nobody knew how to distinguish mouse-shit from coriander-seeds.
What-has-been meant to hate such rough new brooms, but these in turn wouldn't value what-had-once-been broom too.
And when people are divided by mutual contempt, neither will acknowledge that they are striving for the same thing.
And people who have harshly reproved crass self-regard are the very ones who have the hardest time accepting what others have found of value.

70

If anyone happens to be cheerful and good his neighbour plagues him at once; for as long as the worthy man lives and acts, they'd really rather stone him. But no sooner is he dead than they solicit donations to set up a monument to honour his life of wretchedness. But the mob should really calculate what's to its best advantage. It would really be cleverer to forget the good man for good.

71

Superiority, you can sense it, cannot be banned from the world; I like to converse with the clever and with despots.
Since the stupid and limited always throb the most, and the mediocre, the hemmed-in, would all too eagerly subdue us,
I have declared myself free from both the fools and the wise; the latter remain unruffled while the former can savage themselves as they wish.

They think that in the end we must be allied in power and love, they make the sun sad upon me, and they heat up my cooling shades.

Hafiz too and Ulrich Hutten³ must certainly gird themselves against brown and blue habits;⁴ mine proceed like other Christians.

'But just give us the enemies' names!' Let no one single them out: as it is, I have already enough to put up with in this society.

72

If you rest pleased with the good you've done, I'll never find fault with you; and if you actually do what's good, see here, that must ennoble you! But if you've stretched a fence all around your good, I'll live freely at my ease, in no way deceived.

For people are good and would be even better if one man did not act just as another does. Underway – that's a word nobody will condemn – if we want to reach the same place, fine, let's go together!⁵

Many things will oppose us here and there: in love neither helpers nor companions are desired; with gold and with honour one prefers to spend all alone; and even wine, that faithful fellow, can cause discord in the end.

But about all this stuff Hafiz has spoken too; he racked his brain over many a stupid prank. And I don't see what use it is to run away from the world. When the very worst comes to pass you can always choose to fight.

73

As if it depended on names, what in silence only unfurls and reveals itself! Yet I love the good that is beautiful as it takes its form from God.

That I love someone, that is necessary; I hate no one; but if I have to hate I'm ready for that too but then I hate massively, with no holds barred.

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†

But do you want to have a closer acquaintance? Consider the Good, consider the Bad; what others call most excellent, is most likely not the Good.

For to get hold of the Good, you have to live from your depths and exaggerated twaddle strikes me as a shallow endeavour.⁶

Fine, Mr Scribbler, the hack, can team up with Mr Wrecker, so that in the end, Mr Sniffy-Snooper can come off as All- time Best!

That everyone, every day after day, hears some novelty in never-ending renewal, and right away at the same time the distraction destroys each man in himself.

This is what our compatriot wants and loves, let him sign himself as 'German' or 'Cherman'.⁷ But in secret the little song only keeps on cheeping: So it was and so it will remain.

74

Majnun⁸ means – I won't say that it designates a madman; and yet, you mustn't complain of me that I praise myself as Majnun.

When the heart full of eloquence unburdens itself to redeem you, don't shout, 'That is the madman! Fetch restraints, forge shackles!'
And when at last you observe the wisest languishing in chains, it will sting you like fiery nettles to witness that helplessly.

75⁹

Have I ever advised you as to how you should wage your wars? Have I scolded you for your deeds when you wanted to conclude a peace?
So have I calmly watched the fisherman cast out his nets; I've had no need to tell the carpenter to use his level.
But you claim to know better what I know than I ever imagined, and what Nature, ever busy on my behalf, gave me as my very own.
Do you really feel the same strength? Good, then push on with your projects! But when you consider my works, know this first of all: he meant to do it that way.

Let no one raise a complaint over the malign; for it is mighty, whatever one may tell you.

In evil it presides and makes big winnings, and it deals with the good exactly as it pleases.

Wanderer! Do you really want to battle against such necessity? Whirlwind and desiccated dung. Let it spin and crumble.

77

Whoever demands of the world what it lacks and is only dreamt of forever neglects this present day of days in glancing backwards or sideways. Your striving is your good will, it only hobbles behind life that rushes on. And what you needed years ago, she may give you today.

*

78

To praise yourself is a fault and yet, everyone who does something good does so; and even if he's not given to hiding in his words, the good still remains ever good.

You fools, yet leave this joy to the wise man who sees himself as wise, that he, a fool like you, may squander the moronic thanks of the world.

79

Do you really think word of mouth is a genuine gain? Tradition,¹⁰ O you idiot, is also a phantom of the brain!¹¹ Here the judgement must fall; reason alone, that reason you've already forsworn, can deliver you from the shackles of belief.

And whoever frenchifies or britannises, italianises or germanifies:¹² each one is just like the other, self-love spurs them on.

For there is no recognition,¹³ either of many persons or of one, unless it brings to light what they would like themselves to seem.

May the True tomorrow find its friends all well disposed, if only for today the False a spacious place and favour find.

Let anyone who over three thousand years¹⁴ has not come to terms with himself, let him remain clueless in darkness, let him survive from day to day.

In the past, when citing the Holy Qur'an, one named the sura¹⁵ and the relevant verse, and every Muslim, as is proper, felt his conscience reverent and at rest. The new dervishes¹⁶ know no better, they jumble the old and the new together. The confusion grows greater every day. O Holy Qur'an! O everlasting rest!

*The Prophet Speaks*¹⁷

If it vexes anyone that God was pleased to give Muhammad both protection and favour,¹⁸ let him fix the rough cord on the firmest beam of his hall and cling to it! It holds and it bears: he will feel how his vexation abates.

*Timur Speaks*¹⁹

What? You disapprove of the fierce storm of arrogance, you duplicitous parsons! Had Allah destined me to be a worm, He would have created me as a worm.

Hikmet Nameh
THE BOOK OF WISDOM

84

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84

I will strew talismans in the book; that will effect an equipoise. He who stitches with a believing needle, will find a good word everywhere to gladden him.¹

—

From today's day, from tonight's night, demand nothing but what yesterday brought.²

—

Whoever was born in the worst of times will find contentment even in bad days.³

—

How something can be easy, he who discovered and attained it knows.⁴

—

The sea is at flood for ever, the land can never contain it.

85

Why does every hour frighten me so? Life is short, the day is long. And the heart is ever longing away, and I don't really know if it's heavenwards; it wants to be up and away, away, and it longs to escape from itself. If it flees to the beloved's breast it rests unwittingly in paradise. But the whirlpool of life rips it away and it sticks forever in the self-same spot; whatever it wanted, whatever it lost, at the end it remains its own poor fool.

If Fate puts you to the test, it knows well why: it wants you to be moderate! Obey and hold your tongue.

It is still day, let the man bestir himself; the night will come when no one is able to work.⁵

What can you do with the world? It is already made. The Lord of Creation has foreseen all. Your lot is cast, follow the path prescribed, the way has begun, finish the journey: for care and concern don't change it at all, they will only knock you forever off balance.

When the man who is sorely beset complains that help and hope have failed, still there always remains the healing solace of a kindly word.

'How clumsily you behaved when Good Fortune came into the house!' The lass⁶ didn't take it badly and she still came back a couple of times.

How splendid, how broad and wide is my inheritance! Time is my property, my acreage is time.

Do good purely from love of the good! Pass that on to your offspring; and if nothing stays with your kids, your grand-children will have the benefit.

Anvari,⁷ most magnificent of men, connoisseur of the heart's depths, of the mind at its most exalted, has said it: 'In every place and at every time, rectitude, judgement and tolerance are most fitting for you.'

Why do you complain about enemies? Might they ever become your friends, for whom your very being, as you are, is a constant rebuke in silence?

Nothing is harder to bear than when morons say to the wise that they ought to comport themselves on great days with becoming modesty.

If God were as bad a neighbour as I am and you are, we'd both have very little honour; He lets each man be as he is.⁸

Admit it! The poets of the Orient are greater than we of the Occident. Even so, we are completely on a par with them in hatred of our counterparts.

Everyone everywhere wants to be on top, just as it happens in the world. Sure, everyone should be blunt,⁹ but only in what he himself understands.

Spare us Your wrath, O God! Even the little wrens give voice.¹⁰

If envy wants to rip itself apart, let it satisfy its hunger.¹¹

To be held in respect, you must be very bristly. Everything can be hunted with falcons, except for the wild boar.¹²

What good does it do the parson-crowd¹³ to bar my way? What cannot be grasped directly can't be understood slantwise.

Everyone who has himself boldly striven will name and praise a hero with joy. No one can discern a person's worth who has not himself suffered both heat and cold.¹⁴

Do good purely from love of the good!¹⁵ Whatever you do will not remain with you; and even if it were to remain with you, it won't remain with your children.

So that no one can steal from you in the most despicable way, hide your money, your departure, your belief.¹⁶

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92

How does it come about that in every place you hear so much that is good, so much that is idiotic? Young people parrot the words of the old and imagine that the words are their own.

At no time let yourself be drawn into contradiction; the wise tumble into ignorance as soon as they fight with the ignorant.

‘Why is truth so distant and wide? Why does it hide away in the deepest abysses?’

No one understands at the right moment! If someone did understand at the right time, truth would be near and broad, it would be mild and lovable.

93

Why do you try to discover whence magnanimity flows? Cast your cakes into the water;¹⁷ who knows who will enjoy them.

One day, when I crushed a spider, I wondered whether I ought to have done it? Hadn't God meant for it to have its share of these days, as I have!¹⁸

'Dark is the night, with God is light. Why did He not shape us too like that?'

94

What a gaudy gathering! At God's table both friend and foe are seated.¹⁹

You call me a stingy man; give me what I can fritter away!

If I am to show you the surrounding region, you must first climb up on the roof.

Whoever keeps quiet has little to worry about; the man lies hidden under his tongue.

*

95

A master who has two servants will not be well cared for. A house with two wives will not be swept clean.

You dear folk, stick with it and say only: *Autos epha!*²⁰ Why do you keep on saying 'man' and 'wife'? His name is Adam, hers is Eve.

Why do I thank Allah abundantly? That He has separated suffering and knowing. Every sick man would fall into despair if he knew the malady as the doctor knows it.

How foolish that everyone praises his own opinion in what pertains to him. If *Islam*²¹ means submission to God, we all are living and dying in Islam.

Whoever comes into the world builds a new house. He goes and leaves it to another who arranges it in some other way, and nobody ever is done with it.²²

Whoever steps into my house may well find fault with what I've valued for many years; but he must wait at the door if I'm unwilling to recognise his value.

Lord, may this little house please you! A bigger one could be built but nothing more would come out of it.

You are well provided with what no one can take from you: two friends, no cares, a wine cup, a little book of songs.²³

*

'What has Luqman not brought forth, he whom they call the Ugly One?' The sweetness does not reside in the sugarcane; it is the sugar that is sweet.

The Orient has gloriously crossed over the Mediterranean;²⁴ only he who loves and knows Hafiz understands what Calderon²⁵ has sung.

‘Why do you adorn your one hand far more than befits it?’ What should the left hand do if the right hand doesn’t embellish it?²⁶

Even if you were to lead Christ’s donkey to Mecca, it wouldn’t be better endowed but would still be always a donkey.²⁷

Curd cheese²⁸ that is trodden on spreads out, it does not grow firm.

But if you beat it forcefully into a fixed form it takes on shape. You’ll recognise the same in the stones that Europeans call *Pisé*.²⁹

Don’t be saddened, you good souls! For he who never goes astray knows well when others do; only he who errs has got it right: now he knows exactly what is the good they do well.

‘There are so many you have never thanked who gave you so many good things!’ I’m not so stricken about that. Their gifts live on in my heart.

You must make a good name for yourself, discriminate well among things; whoever hopes to do more than this goes amiss.³⁰

The torrent of passion rages in vain against the unconquerable firm land. It tosses poetical pearls on the shore, and that is already something won from life.³¹

100

CONFIDANT You have granted so many petitions, even when they were detrimental to you. This good fellow hasn't asked for much, and that little bit is no danger.

VIZIER That good man hasn't asked for much, but if I had granted it right away, he would have been lost on the spot.

*

†

101

It's bad, yet it often happens, that truth slips in after falsehood; that's often her good pleasure; who would quiz such a lovely woman? Should Mr Falsehood wish to join up with the truth, Mrs Truth would certainly be far more irked.

Know, it displeases me awfully when so many are singing and gabbing! Who's driving the art of poetry out of the world?
The poets!

Timur Nameh
THE BOOK OF TIMUR

102

The Winter and Timur

So now winter encompassed them with mighty rage. Strewing its icy breath among all, it whipped up the various winds against them in hostility. It gave its frost-tipped tempests harsh dominion over them; it stole down into Timur's council, shrieked menacingly at him and said: Easy does it, slow down, you unfortunate wretch! Change, you despot of misrule; shall your flames singe and burn hearts yet longer? Are you one of the cursed spirits? Fine: I am another. You are an old man but so am I! We freeze lands just as we freeze people. Mars, that's you! I am Saturn, malignant stars, most terrible in conjunction. If you murder souls, if you chill the atmosphere, my winds are even colder than you can be. Your savage troops torment believers with a thousand tortures: Well and good, but in my days – may God grant it! – things far more dire will come to pass; and, by God, I cede nothing to you. May God Himself hear what I offer you! By God, yes! Against mortal cold, Old Man, neither the glowing embers spread out on your hearth, nor any December flame, will shield you.¹

*

103

*To Suleika*²

To fondle you with fragrances so as to enhance your joy, a thousand budding roses must perish first in flames.

Just to obtain a tiny vial, slender as your fingertips, and that holds its scent for ever, demands a world entire.

A world full of lively impulses that in the fullness of its surge prefigured Bulbul's³ love, his soul-arousing song.

Should such torment torment us since it so intensifies our delight? Has not Timur's reign devoured a myriad of souls?

Suleika Nameh
THE BOOK OF SULEIKA

*In the night I thought I saw the
moon in sleep; but when I awoke
the sun suddenly arose.[†]*

*

104

Invitation

You must not flee before the day: for the day that you hurry towards is no better than the day today; but if you stay happily here where I have set the world aside the better to draw it to me,⁴ you will be safe and secure with me. Today is today, tomorrow tomorrow, and what comes after and what is past, neither tarries nor remains immobile. Stay, O my best-beloved, for it is you who bring it and you who give it.⁵

105

No wonder that Suleika⁶ was besotted with Joseph; he was young, youth finds favour, he was handsome – bedazzlingly so, they say – she was beautiful, they could take delight in one another. But that you, who for so long kept me in yearning, now send me fiery glances of youth, that you now love me, bestow favour on me – that is what my songs must praise: forever will you be Suleika for me.

*

†

106

Since now you are named Suleika, I too should be given a name. Whenever you praise your beloved, Hatem!⁷ should be the name. Only, if I be acknowledged as such, let it not be seen as presumption: someone who calls himself a knight of St. George doesn't fancy himself St. George on the spot. In my poverty I cannot be Hatim Ta'i, not that all-giving man; nor might I be Hatim Zoghra'i,⁸ richest of all living poets: still, to have both in mind will not be utterly reprehensible; to accept, to bestow, the gifts of good fortune, will always be a huge delight. To pleasure each other lovingly will be the bliss of paradise.

107

HATEM Occasion doesn't make the thief, it is itself the greatest thief; for it stole what was left of the love that still remained in my heart.

Occasion handed over to you my whole life's gain, so that now, impoverished, I await life only from you.

And yet, I already sense compassion in the garnet⁹ of your glance and in your arms I enjoy my destiny made new.

SULEIKA Supremely happy in your love, I do not blame occasion. If to you it came as a thief, how such a robbery gladdens me!

But then, why speak of robbery? Give yourself to me of your own free choice; I'd find it much too sweet to think that yes, it was I who stole you away.

What you have so freely given returns a splendid gain to you; my tranquillity, my rich life I gladly give, take it away!

Don't joke! Don't talk of impoverishment! Doesn't love make us rich? When I take you in my arms, my happiness surpasses anyone's.

109

The lover will not go astray, however dreary it becomes all around him. Were Layla and Majnun¹¹ to rise up from their graves, they would learn from me the path of love.¹²

Is it possible, Beloved, that I caress you, that I hear the heavenly sound of your voice! The rose always appears impossible, inconceivable the nightingale.¹³

110

SULEIKA¹⁴ When I took ship on the Euphrates, the golden ring that you had just given to me slipped down my finger into the water's abyss.

Such was my dream. Daybreak blazed in my eyes through the tree. Say, Poet, say, Prophet! What is the meaning of this dream?

HATEM I am ready to interpret this! Haven't I told you often how the Doge of Venice married himself to the sea?¹⁵

Thus from your fingers the ring fell into the Euphrates. Ah, sweet dream, you inspire me to thousands of heaven's songs!

I, who wandered from Hindustan to Damascus, to set out with new caravans up to the Red Sea,

you have wedded me to your river, to this terrace and this wood – here till the final kiss shall my soul be dedicated.

How well I know men's glances. One says, 'I love, I suffer! I crave, O I despair!' And all the rest a young girl knows. All that cannot be of help to me, all that cannot touch me; but your glances, O Hatem, give the day its radiance. For they say, 'It's *she* who pleases me, as nothing else can please me. I see roses, I see lilies, the embellishment and honour of all gardens, and so cypresses, myrtles, violets, risen up to adorn the earth; and so adorned she is a miracle, surrounding us with amazement, reviving, healing, blessing us, so that we feel ourselves made healthy, but would wish to be ailing once again.' You glimpse Suleika there, and you are made healthy though being sick, and you sicken while becoming healthy, you smile and you gaze on her as you've never smiled before in this world. And Suleika feels your gaze's everlasting words: 'It's *she* who pleases me, as nothing else can please me.'

113

*Gingko Biloba*¹⁶

The leaf of this tree, that from the East has been entrusted to my garden, gives a secret meaning to savour as it gladdens those who know.

Is it One living being that divides itself within itself? Is it two that have chosen each other so as to be seen as One?

To answer such questions I have discovered the correct sense: do you not feel that in my songs I am both double and One?

114

SULEIKA Say, you have written many poems, sent your songs here and there, beautifully written, in your own hand, sumptuously bound, edged in gold, consummate to the last point and line, many a volume exquisitely alluring. Always, wherever you directed them, surely it was a pledge of love?

*

HATEM Yes, of powerfully pure glances, as from smiling enchantment, and from teeth, dazzlingly bright, musk-suffusing ringlet-serpents, eyelashes laden with charm, thousand-fold perils! Think now, for just how long Suleika has been prophesied.

115

SULEIKA The sun is coming! A phenomenon of splendour! The crescent moon envelops it. Who might conjoin these two? This enigma, who can elucidate it? How?

HATEM The Sultan can do it, he weds the supreme world- couple, to designate the elect, the bravest of the faithful throng.

Be you as well an image of our bliss! Already I see myself and you again: Darling, you call me your sun. Come, my sweet moon, envelop me!

Come, darling, come! Wind my headgear on! Only from your hand is the turban beautiful! Even 'Abbas,¹⁷ on Iran's highest throne, has not seen his head more exquisitely enwreathed!

A turban was the head-band that beautifully fell in knotted strands from Alexander's head and after him, all successive rulers preferred it to any other as a royal adornment.

It is a turban that graces our Emperor. It's called a crown. The name goes well! Jewels and pearls! May the eye be dazzled! The most beautiful embellishment is always muslin.

Wreath that adornment, wholly pure and silver-threaded, around my brow, Beloved. What, after all, is grandeur? I am familiar with it! You look at me: I am as great as He.¹⁸

*

It's only very little that I ask, for almost everything delights me and even that little how gladly the world keeps on giving me!

Often I sit cheerfully in the tavern, and cheerfully in my little house; but as soon as I think of you, my spirit expands like a conqueror.

Timur's kingdoms should be at your beck and call, his imposing armies should obey you, Badakhshan pay you tribute in rubies, the Hyrcanian Sea¹⁹ in turquoises.

Dried fruits, sweet as honey, from Bukhara, that sunny place, and thousands of precious poems, written on silk, from Samarkand.²⁰

There, joyously you would read what I send you from Ormuz, and how the whole business of trade functions only out of love for you.

*

†

How in the country of the Brahmins many thousands of fingers are busily at work, so that the entire splendour of Hindustan blossoms for you in wool and silk.
Yes, how for the glory of the beloved, the torrents of Soumelpur are scoured, and from earth, rock-rubble, shards, pebbles, the diamonds are washed free for you.
How the daring men of the diving bands pluck the bounty of pearls from the Gulf, which a council of sharp-eyed connoisseurs bestirs itself to string for you.
And if Basra adds the last offering of spices and incense, the caravans will bring you everything that the world holds dear.
But all these royal riches would fluster your glance in the end; hearts that truly love feel felicity only in each other.

*

Would I have any scruple presenting you, my sweet darling, with Bukhara and Samarkand, the giddiness and frivolity of these towns?
But just ask the Emperor whether he would give you these cities? He is wiser and more magnificent; yet, he doesn't really know how one should love.

Sovereign, you would never make up your mind to give such gifts! You must have such a girl as mine and be a beggar like me.

119

The beautifully written, splendidly gilded books make you smile – those overconfident pages; you forgive me for my swaggering about your love and the success I have had because of you, you forgive my pleasure in self-love.

Self-love! Only to the envious does it stink, it is a pleasing fragrance to friends and one's own taste!

Great is the joy of existence, even greater the joy in existing. When you, Suleika, overwhelm me with happiness, when you toss me your passion, as if it were a ball, that I may catch, and toss back to you my own devoted self:²¹ What an instant that is! But now the Frank, now the Armenian, rips you from me.²²

But days pass, it takes years for me to re-create the thousandfold abundance of your extravagance, unravel the gaudy strands of my felicity, woven of a thousand threads by you, O Suleika!

Here now, in return, poetic pearls, which the fierce breaking surf of your ardour cast up for me on my life's desolate shore. With your fingertips, exquisitely adorned, arrayed with jewels set in gold, take them to your throat, to your breast! These raindrops from Allah, ripened in a modest shell.

120

Love upon love, hour upon hour, word upon word and glance upon glance; kiss upon kiss from the most faithful mouth, breath upon breath and bliss upon bliss. So in the evening, so in the morning! But you sense in my songs an ever-secret sorrow; I'd like to borrow Joseph's charms so as to respond to your beauty.

121

SULEIKA People and serf and conqueror at every time avow: the supreme felicity of earth's children lies in personality²³ alone.

Every life may be led so long as one does not lose oneself. One can lose everything, so long as one remains what one is.

HATEM That may well be! So people think. But I am on another track: I find all earthly happiness united only in Suleika.

Because of the way she lavishes herself on me I become a genuine self;²⁴ were she to turn away from me, I'd instantly lose myself.

Then it would be the end of Hatem; but I have chosen another solution: I embody myself nimbly in the upstanding man whom she cherishes.

I'd not be a rabbi – that wouldn't suit me at all, but rather Firdowsi²⁵ or Mutanabbi,²⁶ or in any event, an emperor.

122

HATEM Like the polished many-coloured candles in the gold-smith's little stall in the bazaar, so lovely girls surround the almost grey-haired poet.

GIRLS Again you're singing of Suleika! We really can't put up with her – not because of you but because of your songs, we have to envy her.

For, even if she were hideous, you'd make her out to be the loveliest creature; in the same way we've read a great deal about Jamil²⁷ and Buthaynah. But just because we are pretty, we'd like to be portrayed as well, and if you do it as you should, you'll be quite prettily rewarded too.

*

HATEM Come, you brunette! That will work. Tresses, combs, both big and small, adorn your head's sleek purity, as the cupola adorns the mosque.
Little blonde, you are so elegant, in every way so exquisite, you make me think at once – and aptly so – of a minaret.
You there in the back, you have eyes of two sorts,²⁸ you can use them individually as you like, but I should avoid you.
One, under the gentle pressure of the eyelids that overshadow the pupil, looks roguish while the other peers out honestly.
That eye, when the other hooks and wounds, acts to heal and sustain. I can't praise anyone with any pleasure who lacks such a double glance.²⁹
And so I could praise them one and all, and so could I love them one and all: for even as I exalt you all, my lady is implicitly described.

GIRLS The poet likes being made a slave, since he gains mastery from it; but it suits him best above all when his sweetheart herself is singing.

Is she then gifted with song, such as those that reign on our lips? For it makes her suspect that she acts in secret.

HATEM Well, who knows what she's capable of! Do you know the depth of such an abyss? A song she feels deeply inside her, a song she's composed herself, springs forth from her mouth.

Not a single one of you poetesses even comes close to her: she sings to please me while you sing only, love only, yourselves.

GIRLS Watch out! You've hoodwinked us, as if she were one of those hours!³⁰ So be it! As long as no one here on this earth preens herself so.

123

HATEM Curls, you hold me captive in the oval of the face! I have nothing to counter these much-loved brown serpents.

This heart alone is permanent, it beats in the youngest bloom. Beneath snow and chilly fog, an Etna rushes towards you.

*

You bring forth a blush like the dawn on the stern slope of every peak and Hatem once again feels spring's breath and summer's blaze.

Cup-bearer, here! Another bottle! I drink this cup to her! If she finds a little heap of ashes, she'll say: He burned himself up for me.

124

SULEIKA³¹ I don't want ever to lose you! Love gives love its strength. May you adorn my youth with your mighty passion. Oh, how it pampers my ardour when I hear my poet praised: For love is life and spirit the life of life.

125

Let your sweet ruby mouth not chafe at intrusions; what other motive does love's sorrow have than to seek for a cure?

Though you are separated from your beloved, as Orient is from Occident, the heart races across all deserts. Everywhere it is its own escort. For those who love, even Baghdad is not far.

126

May it always restore itself, your brittle world, within itself! These clear eyes that gleam, this heart, it beats for me!

O how numerous are the senses! They bring confusion into happiness. When I see you I wish that I were deaf, when I hear you, that I were blind.

Even at a distance so close to you! The pain comes unexpectedly. Then I hear you once again, suddenly you are there again!

127

How can I be serene, removed from the day and the light? But now I shall write to you and I have no wish to drink.

When she drew me to herself, there was no speech in play, and as the tongue stood still, so did the pen stay too.

Pour again! Beloved cup-bearer, fill my cup in silence too! I say only: Remember! You already know what I want.

128

When I'm thinking of you, the cup-bearer asks me right away: 'Master, why so still? For Saqi³² always loves to hear your lessons over and over again.'

When I forget myself beneath the cypresses, he leaves me be; and in that silent sphere, I am become quite wise, and shrewd as Solomon.

†

129

*The Book of Suleika*³³

I'd like very much to compress this book so that it would be tightly laced up like the others. But how can you cut short pages and words when the madness of love drives you on?

130

On the laden twigs of the shrubs, Beloved, take a look! Let me show you the fruits, their spiky green husks.

For a long time they hang down, clustered, still, unknown to themselves; one branch that wavers and swings rocks them patiently.

But the brown kernel ever ripens within and swells; it longs to reach the air and would love to see the sun.

The husk bursts open and downward with joy it breaks free; just so my songs fall and are heaped in your lap.³⁴

131

SULEIKA At the rim of the jubilant fountain that plays in ribboning trickles, I didn't know what held me fast; but there, faintly traced by your hand, was my cipher.
I lowered my eyes, in love with you.

Here, at the end of the orderly promenade along the canal I look again up into the sky and there I glimpse again my faintly traced letters: Stay! O stay in love with me!

HATEM May the surging whirling water and the cypresses avow: From Suleika to Suleika is my coming and my going.

132

SULEIKA Hardly have I found you again and refreshed you with kisses and songs than you are silent, turned within yourself; what hems you in and oppresses and vexes you?

HATEM Ah, Suleika, shall I tell you? Instead of praising I'd rather complain! Once you sang only my songs, ever new, over and over again.

133

Behramgur, sagt man, hat den Reim erfunden, Er sprach entzückt aus reiner Seele Drang; *Dilaram* schnell, die Freundinn seiner Stunden, Erwiderte mit gleichem Wort und Klang.

I should praise these as well, but they are merely slipped within; they're not by Hafiz, nor Nizami, not by Sadi nor by Jami.³⁵

I know well the throng of Fathers,³⁶ syllable by syllable, note by note, in my memory never lost; but these are newly born.

Were they written yesterday, tell me, have you committed yourself anew? Do you, gladly bold, breathe an alien breath on me that enlivens you as much, that hovers with love so much, luring, beckoning to a union, as harmonious as is the one with me?

SULEIKA Hatem stayed away so long that his girl has learned a thing or two. He praised her so handsomely, then the separation put her to the test. Good, if these songs do not seem strange to you; they are Suleika's, they are yours!³⁷

133

They say that Bahram Gur³⁸ discovered rhyme, he spoke excitedly from the press of his pure soul; once *Dilaram*, the companion of his hours, replied with the very same word and note.

And so, Beloved, you were given to me to discover the pure pleasure of using rhyme so that I no longer need to envy even Bahram Gur, the Sasanian. I have it too.

You woke up this book in me, you gave it to me, for what I joyously spoke out of the fullness of my heart, echoed back out of your own noble life, as glance to glance, so rhyme to rhyme.

Now may it ring out to you, even from far away; the word comes through, though tone and sound die out. Is it not the mantle still sewn with stars? Is it not the supremely illumined All of love?

134

To be at one with your glance, your mouth, your breast, to catch your voice, was the final pleasure and the first.

Yesterday, ah, it was the last, and then flame and fire went out, all the light caprice that enchanted me, now turned heavy with care and scarce.

Before it pleases Allah to unite us once again, the sun, the moon, the world itself, give me nothing but occasions to weep.

135

SULEIKA What does this agitation mean? Does the East wind bring me glad tidings? The fresh movement of its wings cools the heart's deep wound.

It plays caressingly with the dust, drives it up in light clouds, it drives the merry tribe of insects towards the safety of the vines.

It softly gentles the sun's glow, and it cools my hot cheeks as well; in its flight it kisses the grapes that are lustrous on field and hill.

Its faint whisper brings to me a thousand greetings from the friend; even before these hills darken, thousands of kisses greet me.

And so you follow your path afar! Serve friends and the downcast. Down there, where the high walls glow, I will soon find the dearly beloved.

Ah, true knowledge of the heart, love's breath, life revived, will come to me only from his mouth, only his breath can give it back to me.³⁹

Supreme Image

The sun, the Helios of the Greeks, moves gloriously along the heavens' path; assured of besieging the cosmos, he looks around, below, above.

He sees the loveliest goddess weeping, the clouds' daughter, heaven's child; he seems to shine for her alone, to all loftier spaces blind.

He sinks down in sorrow and dread and her tears gush down more frequently. He sends delight into her grief, each pearl a kiss upon kiss.

Now she feels deeply the force of his glance, and unswervingly gazes on high; the pearls seem prepared to take shape for each one assumes his image.

And so, wreathed around by hue and rainbow, her face shines brilliantly; drawn to her he comes forward and yet, alas! he cannot reach her.

And so, by the harsh decree of fate, you turn away from me, my best-beloved; and even if I were Helios, what good would my throned chariot be?

137

Echo

It sounds so splendid when the poet likens himself now to the sun, now to the Emperor; but he hides the mournful faces when he slips through murky night.

Caught in streaks of cloud the purest blue of sky sank down into night; my cheeks are pale and gaunt and my heart's tears are grey.

Don't leave me so to the night, to grief, you, my best loved of all, you my face of the moon!⁴⁰ O you my phosphor, my candle, you my sun, you my light!

138⁴¹

SULEIKA Ah, how much I envy you, West Wind, for your moist wings: for you can let him know how I suffer in separation!

The beating of your wings awakens a silent longing in my breast; flowers, eyes, wood and hill are in tears at your breath.

But your mild, soft gust cools the wounded eyelids; ah, I must die of grief if I didn't hope to see him once more.
Hurry then to my love, speak softly to his heart; but refrain from saddening him and conceal my suffering from him.
Tell him, but say it with restraint: his love is my life. The joyous feeling of these both will give me his presence close by.

139

*Finding Again*⁴²

Is it possible, Star of stars, that I press you once more to my heart! Ah, what an abyss, what a sorrow, is the night of sundering! Yes, it is you, the sweet beloved adversary of my joy; in the remembrance of past sufferings, I shudder at the present.

When the world lay on God's eternal breast in the limitless abyss, He ordained the first hour in the exalted ardour of creation, and He spoke the word: Be!⁴³ An agonising⁴⁴ Alas! rang back when the universe split apart with a mighty gesture.

Light spread: the darkness shyly distanced itself, and right away the elements, separating, scattered flew apart from one another; swiftly, in wild and desolate barren dreams, each hurled itself afar, fixed, into infinite spaces, without any yearning, without harmony.

All was mute, still and void; for the first time God was lonely! So He created the dawn that took pity on this agony;⁴⁵ it made a ringing play of colours in the gloom and only now could what had been scattered discover love.

With hurried efforts what belonged together sought each other out, and to life immeasurable both feeling and glance were turned. Be it compelled, be it scrambled together, so long as it assembles and holds! Allah no longer needs to create. We are creating His world.

And so with the wings of rosy dawn, I was drawn to your mouth, and the night with a thousand seals strengthened our starbright bond. On this earth both of us stand as exemplars of joy and pain. And a second word: Be! will not separate us a second time.

Night of the Full Moon

Tell me, Lady, what does this whispering mean? What makes your lips move so lightly? You murmur over and over to yourself, sweeter than sipping wine! Do you imagine you'll attract another pair of lips to yours?

'I want to kiss! To kiss!' I said.

Look! In dubious darkness all the branches glow as they bloom. One star after another falls; and through the thickets a thousand-faceted gem shines emerald: but your mind is far from everything.

'I want to kiss! To kiss!' I said.

Far away, your beloved tests the bitter-sweet like you, feels happiness that is misery; you have both made a sacred promise to meet one another at the full moon. This is the very moment.

'I want to kiss! To kiss!' I say.

Coded Language

O diplomats, take this very much to heart and advise your potentates sincerely and subtly! The transmission of secret ciphers preoccupies the world until at the last, every turn of phrase ends up as the same.

Thanks to my sweet lady the cipher is familiar to me, and I enjoy it so because she discovered this art; it is the fullness of love in the dearest domain, the pure true will that exists between her and me.

It is a vivid bunch of flowers a thousandfold, a house well-inhabited by angelic temperaments, a sky sown with the gaudiest feathered birds, an ocean ringing with fragrantly wafted songs.

It is a secret cipher-script of absolute intent that pierces into the marrow of life like arrow after arrow. What I've disclosed to you has been a pious convention for a long time; and if you have figured it out, keep quiet and use it.

*Reflection*⁴⁶

A mirror has become mine, I like to peer within it, as though the Imperial Order⁴⁷ hung from me in double reflection. It's not out of love for myself that I look for myself everywhere: I am glad to be convivial, and that is the case here too.

Now when I stand before the mirror in my silent widower's house, before I know it the beloved peeps out too. Quickly I turn but again, she whom I saw disappears. Then I look in my songs and right away she reappears.

I write ever more beautiful songs, more in accord with my taste, in spite of carpers and mockers, and every day I succeed. Her image in its opulent finery only grows lovelier amid golden rows of roses and the lapis lazuli frame.

143⁴⁸

SULEIKA With what innermost delight, Song, I grasp your sense! Lovingly you seem to say that I am at his side again.

That he thinks of me eternally, and sends forever more the bliss of his love to the distant one who has dedicated her life to him.

Yes, my heart is the mirror, Friend, wherein you see yourself; this breast where your seal has been pressed by kiss upon kiss.

Sweet poetry, pure truth, shackle me in sympathy: the clarity of love pristinely incarnated in the garment of poetry.

Let Alexander have his world-mirror;⁵⁰ for what does it show? Here and there silent peoples along with others whom he rattles by force back and forth.
 You! do not strive further abroad! Sing for me whom once you made yours by your song. Think that I love you, that I live, think that you have overpowered me.

The world everywhere is lovable to look at, but the world of the poets is especially beautiful; on the fields, by day and by night, lights glimmer. Today all is splendour for me; if only it could last! Today I see through the eye-glass of love.

†

You may conceal yourself in a thousand forms, and yet, Most Beloved of All, I know you right away; you may cloak yourself in magic veils, Omnipresent One, I know you straight away.

In the purest youthful upsurge of the cypress, O You All- Beautiful, I know you at once; in the pristine living ripples of the canal, O All-Caressing One, I know you well.

When the ascending column of water fans out, All-Playing One, how happily I recognise you; when clouds take form and are transformed, All-Manifold One, I know you there.

On the meadows' carpet, flower-veiled, All-Star-Bright Bedecked, I recognise your loveliness; and when the ivy with its thousand tendrils grips, O All-Encompassing, I know you there.

When dawn is kindled on the mountain, at once, O Exalter of All, I greet you. Then, the heavens above me grow pure and round, then O Sweller of all hearts,⁵¹ I breathe you in.

Whatever I know with my outer and inner senses, You All-Teaching One, I know through you; and if I name the hundred names of Allah, each one sounds like a name for you.

Saki Nameh
THE BOOK OF THE CUP-BEARER

147

Yes, I've spent my time in the tavern too, I've had my drink measured out, just like the others; they chatted, shouted, discussed their day, as glad and sorry as the day dictated. But I sat, gladdened deeply within. I thought about my beloved – how does she love? I do not know, but how it oppresses me! I love her, just as the heart commands that has surrendered itself to One and hangs on her like a slave. Where was the parchment, where the reed-pen, that could grasp all that? And yet, so it was! Yes, just so!

148

I sit alone, where can I be better off? My wine I drink alone; nobody sets limits on me. In this way I have my thoughts to myself.

Muley the thief managed to write, even when drunk, a lovely calligraphy.

Whether the Qur'an is from eternity?¹ I don't question that! Whether the Qur'an was created? That I do not know! That it is the Book of Books I believe as my Muslim duty. But that wine² is from eternity – that I do not doubt; or that it was created by the angels is also no fairy tale.³ The drinker, however it may be otherwise, looks God frankly in the face.

We must all be drunk!⁴ Youth is drunkenness without any wine; if the old man drinks himself back into youth, that's a wonderful virtue. Dear life does its best to load us with cares, but the vine is the killer of cares.

There's nothing more to be discussed! Wine is solemnly forbidden. But if you must drink, drink only the very best wine: you'll be an infi del twice over if you're damned for rough rot-gut.⁵

As long as you're sober, you like what's bad. Once you've drunk, you know what's right; still, excess is ever at hand: Hafiz, instruct me how you understood this! For my opinion is not overblown: if you can't drink, you shouldn't love. But you drinkers shouldn't consider yourselves superior: if you cannot love, you shouldn't drink.

SULEIKA Why are you often so unruly?

HATEM You know that the body is a dungeon; the soul has been hoodwinked into it; in there, it has no elbow-room. Should she want to escape from it, you must shackle the prison itself in chains: Thus, the poor thing is doubly endangered which is why she often so bizarrely gestures.

153

If the body is a dungeon, why is only the dungeon so thirsty? The soul feels cosy there and would remain quite jolly at heart; but should a bottle of wine enter in, and then another, Soul cannot bear it any longer but smashes the bottle into bits on the door.

154

To the Waiter

Don't set the jug so crassly under my nose, you lout! Whoever brings me wine should look at me amiably; otherwise the prize vintage⁶ will turn cloudy in my glass.

155

To the Cup-Bearer⁷

You charming boy, come in, why do you stand there on the threshold? From now on you shall be my cup-bearer, and every wine will taste good and be clear.

156

The Cup-Bearer Speaks

You with your brown curls, get away from me, you cunning strumpet! When I serve my master to his liking, he gives me a kiss on the brow.

But as for you, I'd bet, you wouldn't be content with that; your cheeks, your breasts, would wear my friend out.

Do you really think you fool me when now you coyly slip away? I will bed down on the threshold and wake up if you creep in.

157

They've complained about us in many ways because of drunkenness and yet, about drunkenness they haven't said it all. It's usual with drunkenness to vanish when dawn breaks; but my drunkenness has tracked me around the whole night long. It is love's drunkenness that plagues me pitifully, from day to night, from night to day it hesitates, in my heart which swells and rises in the drunkenness of song, such that no sober drunkenness can ever soar so high. The drunkenness of love, song and wine, whether by night or by day, the godliest drunkenness that enraptures and tortures me.⁸

158

You little rascal you! That I keep my head, that only matters. And so I am glad for your presence too, you most lovable of all, even when I'm drunk.

159

What an uproar there was in the tavern at the crack of dawn! Inn-keeper and serving girls! Torches! Crowds! What dealings there were, what insults!

The flute was playing, the drum banged! It was a horrific kerfuffle! And yet, even I, full of love and joy, was also there.

That I've learned nothing at all of good manners – the whole world scolds me for that; and yet, I prudently stay far away from the squabbles of schools and their lecterns.

160

CUP-BEARER What a state you're in! Master, you creep so late from your bedroom! The Persians call this *bidamag budan*, the Germans *Katzenjammer*.⁹

POET Leave me now, beloved boy! The world holds nothing to please me. Not the sheen nor the fragrance of the rose, not the song of the nightingale.

CUP-BEARER I shall treat just that, and I think that I will succeed; here, enjoy the fresh almonds, and wine will taste good again.

Then I shall sit you with cool breezes on the terrace, and while I hold you in my gaze, you'll give a kiss to the cup-bearer.

Look! The world is no sordid den, it is ever rich in new broods and nests, in rose perfume and oil of roses; and the nightingale too sings as she sang yesterday.

161

That nasty old hag, the wheedling one, that's called the World, has swindled me like everybody else. She took Faith away from me, then Hope, and now that she has Love in her sights, I pull away. To secure the salvaged treasure forever I share it judiciously out between Suleika and Saqi. Each of the two will take up the wager to render me higher interest. And I am richer than ever: I have my faith back! My faith in her love. He gives me, in the cup, a glorious feeling for the present – what do I need hope for!

162

CUP-BEARER Today you've had a lot to eat and you've had even more to drink; but what you forgot at the meal lies covered in this little bowl.

See, we call these 'little swans'¹⁰ that pleasure the sated guest. I bring this to my swan that proudly breasts the waves.

But it's the singing swan that we want to know of, that sings himself into the grave; let me forgo every song if it signifies your end.

163

CUP-BEARER They call you the great poet when you show yourself in the marketplace. I love to hear when you sing and I prick up my ears when you're silent.

But I love you even more when you give me a kiss to remember; for words pass over while the kiss remains with me forever.

To put rhyme upon rhyme means a lot but it's better still to think. Sing for the others but with the cup-bearer be mute.

POET Cup-bearer, come! Another glass!

CUP-BEARER Master, you have drunk enough; they'll call you the crazy toper!

POET Have you ever seen me laid out cold?

CUP-BEARER May Muhammad prevent it!

POET Darling! If no one can hear I'll tell you.

CUP-BEARER Since for once you're pleased to speak, I don't need to ask very much.

POET Listen! we other Muslims have to be bowed down when we're sober. He¹¹ in his holy zeal would like to be drunk alone.

*

SAQI Think, my master! When you've been drinking, a fiery blaze glitters all around you! A thousand sparks crackle and flash but you don't know where they catch hold.

I see monks in the corners when you pound the table; they conceal themselves, the hypocrites, while you bear your heart wide open.

Just tell me why youth, still not free from every fault, so lacking in any virtue, is smarter than old age.

You know everything that heaven bears, everything the earth, and you do not conceal the tumult as it rages in your heart.

HATEM Because of this, beloved boy, stay young and stay smart; for poetry is a gift from heaven and yet it's a snare in our life on earth.

One nurtures it at first in secret, but then one gabbles from morn to night! The poet keeps his mouth shut in vain. Poetry itself is treachery.

*

Summer Night

POET The sun has set but in the West it glimmers still; I'd like to know how long the golden shimmer lasts?

CUP-BEARER Master, if you wish I will stay here on watch outside these tents; when the night is mistress of that glimmer,¹² I'll come at once to let you know.

For I know that you love to gaze on the heights, on the infinite, when all those fires in the azure sing each other's praises.

Even the brightest wants only to say, 'Right now I shine in my place; if God wished to illumine you more, you would gleam as brightly as I.'

For all is splendid in God's sight, just because He is the best; and so all the birds are asleep now in their big or little nests.

One still sits perched on the branches of the cypress where the soft wind sways him till the dawn dew's wafting moisture.

Solches hast du mich gelehret, Oder etwas auch dergleichen, Was ich je dir abgehöret Wird dem Herzen nicht entweichen.

Eule will ich, deinetwegen, Kauzen hier auf der Terrasse, Bis ich erst des Nordgestirnes Zwillings-Wendung wohl erpasse.

Und da wird es Mitternacht seyn, Wo du oft zu früh ermunterst, Und dann wird es eine Pracht seyn, Wenn das All mit mir bewunderst.

DICHTER Zwar in diesem Duft und Garten Tönet Bulbul ganze Nächte, Doch du könntest lange warten Bis die Nacht so viel vermöchte.
 Denn in dieser Zeit der Flora, Wie das Griechen-Volk sie nennet, Die Stroh Wittwe, die Aurora Ist in Hesperus entbrennet.
 Sieh dich um! sie kommt! wie schnelle! Ueber Blumenfelds Gelänge! – Hüben hell und drüben helle, Ja die Nacht kommt ins Gedränge.
 Und auf rothen leichten Solen Ihn, der mit der Sonn' entlaufen, Eilt sie irrig einzuhohlen; Fühlst du nicht ein Liebe-Schnaufen?
 This is what you've taught me, or something very similar; what I have heard from you will never depart from my heart.
 An owl for your sake, I will huddle here on the terrace while I await the twinning turn of the North Star.
 And then it will be midnight when you are often too early aroused, and then it will be sheer glory when you are wonderstruck, with me, before the
 All.

POET True, in this fragrant air and garden, Bulbul sings all night; but you could wait long before Night will have fully prevailed.
 For in the season of Flora, as the Greeks named her, Aurora, that straw-widow, is aflame with love for Hesperus.¹³
 Look there! she comes! how quickly! over the whole length of the flowering field! Brightness here and brightness there; yes, Night has been backed
 into a corner.
 On light red soles she rushes in her frenzy to catch hold of him who has run away with the sun. Don't you feel the rough breath of love?

Go now, most lovable of sons, deep within and shut the doors. For she may ravish your beauty as if you were Hesperus.

167

THE CUP-BEARER SLEEPILY

So at last what I longed for from you I have found: God's presence in all the elements. How lovingly you have given that to me! But most lovely of all is
 that you love.

HATEM He sleeps so sweetly and has the right to sleep. You, good lad, have poured out a drink for me; still young you have learned, from your friend and teacher,
 without coercion and discipline, how the old man thinks. But now a pure fullness of health steals into your limbs, so that you may renew yourself. I drink
 on but am quiet, quiet, so that you, not awakening, may delight me still.

Mathal Nameh
THE BOOK OF PARABLES

*

168

From the sky a terrified droplet fell into the roiling dread of the sea, the waves beat savagely; but God imparted the diffident courage of faith and He gave strength and endurance to the drop. A tranquil shell enveloped it. And now, to its everlasting praise and recompense, that pearl gleams today on our Emperor's crown with a pure lustre and a gentle gleam.¹

169

Through that dread Bulbul's night-song pressed towards Allah's bright throne, and to reward that lovely singing He shut her in a golden cage. These are the limbs of man. True, she felt herself hemmed in; but, when she considered it aright, the little soul began to sing again.²

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170

Belief in Miracle

Once I shattered a lovely cup and was quite ready to despair; I sent my clumsiness and my hastiness to all the devils there are. At first I raged but then I softly wept as I swept up the shards. God took pity on me. He recast the cup as whole as it ever had been.³

171

The pearl that escaped from its shell – the most exquisite pearl, the highest-born – said to the jeweller, that upstanding man, ‘I am lost! If you pierce me, my lovely wholeness will be instantly destroyed, and I must end up, step by downward step, with unsavoury sisters.’

‘I’m thinking only of my profit, you really must pardon me; for if here I’m not cruel, how will the necklace be strung?’

*

172

With astonishment and delight I saw a peacock feather lying in the Qur’an: welcome to the sacred place, the supreme treasure of all earthly form! In you, as in the stars of heaven, can the greatness of God in miniature be learned; that He who oversees the worlds, has here placed the imprint of His eye and so adorned the lightest fluff that even kings can scarcely dare to mime the bird’s magnificence. Rejoice in your glory modestly and you will thus be worthy of that holiness.⁴

173

A king had two cashiers, one to receive funds, the other to disburse them; the latter spent so lavishly that the other didn’t know where to get any cash. The spendthrift died; the king didn’t know at first to whom the disbursing office should be given and he hardly had the time to look around when the receiver became enormously rich. Nobody knew what to do with so much gold for in one single day not a cent had been disbursed. Only then did it become clear to the emperor what the source of all that mischief was. He knew how to take advantage of chance to refrain from ever filling that post again.

*

174

The brand-new pot said to the kettle: 'What a grimy belly you have!' 'This is the result of kitchen-use; come, come, you shiny nincompoop, soon your pride will be brought low. Your handle may have a clear surface but don't get puffed up, just take a look at your backside.'

175

All men, great and small, spin a fragile web for themselves where with their pincer tips they sit quite daintily in the centre. But now when a broom pokes in, they say, it's quite unheard of, they've demolished the grandest palace.

176

Coming down from heaven Jesus brought the eternal scripture of the Gospels. He read it by day and by night to his disciples; a divine word, it had its effect and struck home. He rose back to heaven and took it with him; but they had absorbed it well, and each of them wrote, line upon line, what he'd grasped in his mind – all differently. That doesn't mean a thing: They weren't all equally endowed. Even so, Christians can eke out their lives with it until the Judgement Day.⁵

177

It Is Good

By the light of the moon, in paradise, Jehovah found Adam deeply asleep; gently He placed beside him a little Eve who also slept. Now there lay in earthly lineaments God's two most precious thoughts. – Good!!! He cried in praise of His own mastery; He even departed unwillingly.

Small wonder it enthralls us so, when eye gazes into eye afresh, as though we'd come so far as to be with Him who first thought of us. And if He summons us, well now, let it be! I make only one condition: it must be the two of us. The compass of these arms will hold you fast, you dearest of all God's thoughts.

Parsi Nameh
THE BOOK OF THE PARSI

178

The Legacy of Old Persian Belief

Brothers, what legacy should come to you from the poor pious man who is leaving you, whom you younger men have nourished patiently and whose last days you have honoured with your care?

When we often saw the king ride by, all in gold and with gold on every side, with jewels upon him and his great entourage, strewn like densest hail:

Have you ever envied him for that? Haven't you feasted your gaze more gloriously when the sun on the wings of dawn along Damavand's¹ numberless peaks

swept upwards in its arc? Who could withhold his gaze from that? I felt, I felt myself a thousand times, over so many days of my life, borne away with the sun as it came,

to behold God on His throne, to name the Lord of life's source, to do justice to that lofty sight, and to pursue my way in its light.

But when the fiery sphere rose up in its consummation I stood as though blinded in the darkness, I struck my breast and face forward, flung my cooling limbs to the ground.

And now may a sacred legacy be for the will and the remembrance of my brothers: *the daily observation of strict ritual*, no other revelation is needed.

When a newborn moves his pious hands, so that he may be turned straightaway towards the sun, dunk his body and soul in the fiery bath! He'll sense the benediction of each dawn.

Hand over your dead to the living. Cover over even animals with soil and rubble, and insofar as you are able, cover whatever seems to you impure.

Plough your field in purity that the sun may be pleased to shine on your toil; when you plant trees, let them be in rows for that lets good order flourish.

The water too in your canals should never be without its course or its purity; just as the Zayand-i Rud² springs purely from its mountain precincts, so should it flow away in purity again.

So as not to weaken the water's soft fall, take care to dredge the ditches assiduously. Reeds and bulrushes, newts and salamanders – vile creatures – annihilate them one and all!

If you maintain earth and water in such purity, the sun will gladly shine through the air where worthily received, it will bring forth life and give life health and piety.

You, so vexed by care upon care, be comforted: for all is now made pure. And now man may venture forth as a priest to strike God's likeness from the stone.

Acknowledge with gladness where the flame is burning: Bright is night, and limbs become supple again. By the nimble forces of the hearth, raw animal and plant saps ripen.

When you fetch wood to the fire, do so blissfully for you're bearing the seed of the earthly sun; when you pick *panbeh*,³ you can truthfully say: This will form the wick to carry what is holy.

If in the burning of each lamp you piously recognise the glow of a higher light, no mishap will ever prevent you from honouring God's throne at daybreak.

This is the royal seal of our existence, a pure mirror of God for us and for the angels, and whatever only stammers out praise of the Highest is gathered there in circle after circle.

I shall renounce the shores of Zayand-i Rud and beat my wings towards Damawand, as the sun rises, to meet you joyously, and from there I shall bless you eternally.

If man prizes the earth because the sun shines upon it, if he delights in the vine that weeps under the sharp knife – for it senses that its juices, well-simmered, refreshing the world, will stir up many forces though it stifles others – he knows enough to thank the flame that causes all this to prosper, the drunken man stammers as he wobbles, the sober man will sing as he rejoices.

Chuld Nameh
THE BOOK OF PARADISE

*

180

Foretaste

The true Muslim speaks of paradise, as though he himself had been there; he believes in the Qur'an since it promises that: pure doctrine has its foundation here.

And yet the Prophet, the author of this book,¹ knows, from the Beyond, how to sniff out our failings, and despite his thunderous execrations, he sees that doubt often turns faith bitter.

That's why he sent us, from eternal spaces, a young exemplar² to rejuvenate all things; it hovers overhead and seamlessly ensnares my throat in the most lovable of all loops.

On my lap, on my heart, I hold the heavenly entity and want to know nothing more; in paradise I now believe most passionately, for I'd wish to kiss it faithfully forever more.

Justified Men

After the Battle of Badr,³ under the starry sky Muhammad speaks

The enemy may bewail his dead: for they lie down and do not return; you should not mourn our brothers for they wander up above beyond those spheres.

All the seven planets have thrown their metal portals wide open and our transfigured friends are already knocking boldly at the gates of paradise.

They discover there the splendours, unhopèd-for and extravagant, which my own flight⁴ touched when the wonder-horse suddenly transported me through all the heavens.

Trees of knowledge, one after another, cypress-soaring, raise up the gold adornment of their apples; trees of life, casting wide shade, stand amid beds of bloom and wildflower fields.

And now a sweet wind from the East escorts the heavenly-maidens' troupe; with your eyes you start to savour but the spectacle soon sates you utterly.

They stand inquiringly: What were your exploits? Great plans? Dangerous bloody combat? They see that you're a hero for you're here; but what sort of hero are you? they inquire.



They see it right away by your wounds that in themselves inscribe a monument of honour. Luck and majesty all disappear; only the wounds in the cause of faith remain.

They lead you to the pavillions and the greenery, rich in columns of bright luminous stone, and with sips they beckon you to the noble juice of transfigured grapes.

Young man! More than young man, welcome! All are luminous and clear as all; if you've taken one of us to your heart, she'll be the Mistress and the Friend of all our troupe.

But the most accomplished one of all takes no pleasure in such splendours: serene and beyond envy, honest, she engages you with the various perfections of the others.

One conducts you to another's banquet which each one has planned with the utmost care; you have many wives and peace in your house. It's worth winning paradise for that.

Therefore, be yourself at peace; for you can exchange it for no other. Such young girls will never grow weary, such wines will never intoxicate.

This is the scanty report on what the pious Muslim takes pride in. The paradise of men who are heroes of the faith is perfectly furnished in this way.

Chosen Women

Women should lose nothing, it is fitting to hope for pure fidelity;⁵ and yet, we know of only four that have entered already into heaven.

First, Suleika, an earthly sun, all ardent with desire for Yusuf, but who now, bliss of paradise, shines as an ornament of renunciation.⁶

Then the ever-blessed one who bore salvation for the gentiles and, deceived, in bitter sorrow, saw her son lost to the cross.⁷

Muhammad's wife as well who gave him ease of life and glories and who all her life commended One God and one wife.⁸

Then comes Fatima,⁹ the Pure, daughter, wife without reproach, an angelic soul, the purest of all, in her body golden as honey.

We find all of them on high. And whoever has sung women's praise deserves to stroll with these women in eternal places.

*Admittance*¹⁰

HOURI Today I stand on watch before the door of paradise; I don't quite know how I'll do it. You seem so suspect to me!

Are you really related to our Muslims? Is it your battles, your merits, that have sent you to paradise?

Are you reckoned among those heroes? Show me your wounds that will indicate glorious deeds, and I will bring you in.

POET You make too much fuss! Just let me in: For I have been a man, and that means being a warrior.

Sharpen your forceful glances! Here, look right through this breast. See the treachery of life's wounds, see the pleasure of love's wounds!

And yet I sang in a believing way: that my beloved was true to me; that the world, however it turns, is filled with love and thankfulness.

Together with the best I acted until it came to me to have my name in flames of love resplendent in the noblest hearts.

No! You're not choosing some non-entity! Give me your hand so that day by day on your delicate fingers I may count eternity.

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Echo

HOURI Down there, at the spot where I first spoke to you, I waited often at the gate, obeying the command.

I heard there a wondrous succession of sounds, ripples of tones and syllables, that sought to come in; but no one could be seen, and all fell silent bit by bit. But it sounded almost like your songs, now I remember.

POET Eternal Beloved! How tenderly you remember your lover! Whatever, in earthly air and mode sounds out in tones – all want to rise on high; a great many ring out down below but others with the spirit's soaring flight, like the Prophet's winged horse, ascend and twitter, outside, before heaven's gate. If your companions hear such as that, they should accept it in friendliness, and lovingly redouble the echo so that it rings out again here below; and they should take care that in such a case, when the poet arrives, his gifts bring good to all: that will be a kindness to both worlds.

They may reward him in friendship, docile in their loving way, by letting him dwell amongst them; all good people quite self-effacing.
But you are pledged to me, I will not let you leave eternal peace. You shall not go on watch: send some unmarried sister there instead!

185

POET Your love, your kiss, bewitch me! I may not enquire about mysteries but tell me, whether you ever took part in days on earth? It has so often seemed to me – I could swear to it, I could prove it – that once you were called Suleika.

HOURI We were created out of the elements; out of water, fire, earth and air, directly, and the scent of earth is contrary to our nature. We never descend to you; but when you come to rest with us, we have quite enough to do.

For, you see, when the believers came, so warmly recommended by the Prophet, to take possession of paradise, then we were, as he directed, so lovable, so charming, as even the angels had not known us to be.

But the first, the second, the third had had a favourite before; they were haggish beings next to us and yet, they considered us inferior; we were charming, witty, blithe but the Muslims wanted to go back down again.

Now for us, heavenly aristocrats, such behaviour was quite distasteful. We, stirred up and pledged together, searched our minds over and over again. When the Prophet journeyed through heaven, we followed his tracks. On his return, before he could prevent it, his winged horse came to a halt.

Now we had him in our midst! – Solemn but kindly, as is prophetic decorum, we were instructed succinctly by him. But we were quite dissatisfied for to fulfill his purposes, we had to let all go. We had to think as you think. We would look like your beloveds.

All our self-regard was shot. The girls scratched their ears; and yet, we told ourselves, in eternal life you have to put up with everything.

Now each one of you sees here what you saw, and what befell you there happens to you here. We're blondes, we're brunettes, we have our whims, our moods, yes, even quite often, some silly caprice. Everyone thinks he's at home, and we're so fresh and cheerful that they think it must be just so.

But you are endowed with a liberal humour; to you I appear paradisaical. You honour my glance and my kiss; and even if I weren't Suleika, utterly charming as she was, she would be the spitting image of me.

POET You blind me with celestial clarity; whether it be illusion or truth, enough! I admire you above all. In order not to shirk her duty of being pleasing to a German, a houri speaks in doggerel.¹¹

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HOURI Yes, you rhyme too, only be uninhibited, just as it springs from your soul! We consorts of paradise are partial to the words and deeds of a pure spirit. And, just so you know, the animals who were faithful and obedient, aren't excluded either. A coarse word cannot ruffle a houri; we feel whatever comes from the heart. And whatever breaks from a pure spring is allowed to flow in paradise.

HOURI Yet again you touch me with your finger!¹² Do you then know how many aeons we have dwelt together already in such intimacy?

POET No! And I don't want to know. No! O manifold, ever-fresh delight, eternal chaste kisses of a bride! – if every instant pierces me, why would I ask how long it lasts!

HOURI You are absent then too, I mark it well, beyond measure and count. You have not despaired in the universe, you have risked yourself in the deep things of God;¹³ now be aware of your beloved. Haven't you yet prepared your song? How did it sound outside at the gate? How does it sound now? I will not press you more forcefully. Sing me your songs for Suleika: for you won't carry this farther, even in paradise.

Favoured Animals

Four animals were also promised a place in paradise; there they live the eternal year with saints and the devout.

The donkey has the first place here; he comes with a lively step, for Jesus rode on him into the city of prophets.

Then there comes a wolf, a bit shyly, whom Muhammad commanded: Leave this sheep to the poor man, you can take one from the rich.

Now, ever wagging, blithe and brave, with his master who's also brave, the little dog who so loyally slept along with the Seven Sleepers.¹⁴

Abu Hurayra's¹⁵ cat here purrs around his master and wheedles: for it is ever a sacred animal whom the Prophet has caressed.

Higher and Highest

Let no one castigate us for teaching such things: to know how all is clarified you must question your own great deeps.

In this way you will perceive that self-satisfied man would like to see his 'I' saved, both up there and here below.

And my own precious 'I' would require many comforts; the joys that I have tasted here I'd like to have in eternity.

Thus, lovely gardens, flowers and fruit and pretty children that filled us all with joy here would please the rejuvenated mind no less.

And so I'd like to gather all friends, young and old, together as one, that they might stammer the words of paradise in the German tongue.

But right away the dialects are heard, by which humans and angels beguile one another, that hidden grammar that declines both the poppy and the rose.

May there be one delight too in faring further in glances rhetorically¹⁶ and in ascending to celestial ecstasy beyond all notes and tones.

And yet, notes and tones unfold from the word, as is obvious, and the enlightened man decisively senses his own infinity.

The five senses are thereby provided for in paradise; it's certain that I'll gain *one single* sense for all of these.

And now I penetrate more easily in all the places of the eternal circles that are saturated in the Word, the pristine living melody of God.

Unimpeded, in hot urgency, no end can ever be found there until, beholding eternal love,¹⁷ we lose ourselves, we disappear.

*The Seven Sleepers*¹⁸

Six favourites at the court flee from the emperor's¹⁹ wrath, he who has himself revered as God, but does not prove himself a god: for a fly prevents him, revelling in sharp stings; his servants shoo it, flapping at it, but can't chase the fly away. It swarms around him, stings and strays and vexes the table at large; comes back again like an envoy of the spiteful god of the flies.²⁰

Now – so said the boys among themselves – should a tiny fly obstruct God? Should a god drink and feast too as we do? No, the One who created the sun, and the moon as well, and made the vault of the stars that shine over our heads, He is the one. We'll flee! A shepherd took the tender, scantily shod and lightly clothed boys and hid them and himself in a cave in the cliff. The shepherd's dog would not go away; driven off, with a wounded paw, he forced himself on his masters and joined himself to the hidden darlings of sleep.

But the prince from whom they'd fled, outraged in his love, pondered punishments; he set aside both sword and fire but walled them up with bricks and mortar in the cave.

But they slept on and the angel, their protector, reported before God's throne: 'I have turned them again and again to the right and to the left so that a film of mildew not harm their beautiful young limbs. I made fissures in the cliff so that the sun when it rises and sets renews their young cheeks afresh: and so they lie there blissfully. The little dog sleeps in sweet slumber on its sound forepaws.'

Years come, years go; at last the boys wake up, and the wall, all pitted, has fallen down from age. And Iamblichus the handsome, the smartest of them all, says, when the shepherd hesitates in fear: 'I'll run and fetch food for you! I'll risk life and a gold piece!' Ephesus, for many years now, respects Jesus the Prophet's teaching. (Peace be upon that good man!)

And he ran. Now the gates, the ramparts and the tower were all different. But in the closest bakery he ran into to fetch some bread the baker cried: 'You rascal! Have you, young man, found some treasure! Give me this gold piece that betrays you, give me half of it in settlement!'

And they haggle. The matter comes before the king; even the king too, like the baker, wants a share.

But now the wonder is confirmed by hundreds of signs, one after another. On the palace he has built himself he wants to assure his rights. For an excavated column leads to treasures incised with names. The families assemble at once to establish their relationship. And Iamblichus, resplendent as the most primeval father, stands there in the fullness of youth. He hears his son and grandchildren spoken of as of ancestors; the crowd of his descendants surrounds him as a folk of valiant men come to honour him, the youngest. And one sign after another presses forward to complete the proof; he has confirmed his own identity and that of his companions.

And now he goes back to the cave; people and king accompany him. – Not to the king, not to the people, does that Chosen One now turn: for the seven (eight including the dog) who for so long were cut off from the whole world, by Gabriel's secret power have been conveyed to paradise, in accord with the will of God, and the cave appears walled in.

190

Good Night!

Now, my dear songs, lay yourselves down in the hearts of my people! And may Gabriel in a cloud of musk watch kindly over the limbs of the weary poet so that fresh as ever and happily companionable, he may split crevasses and stride through the expanses of paradise joyously with the heroes of all ages; where the beautiful, that is always the new, flourishes for ever on all sides, to gladden the many; and yes, even the little dog, the loyal one, has the right to accompany his masters there.²¹

NOTES AND ESSAYS
FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING
OF THE *WEST-EASTERN DIVAN*

*Whoever wants to understand writing
poetry must go to the land of poetry;
whoever wants to understand the poet,
must go to the poet's land.*

INTRODUCTION

To every thing there is a season!¹ – This is a saying whose significance one appreciates more and more the longer one lives. And so there's a time to be silent and another time to speak, and it's this second time upon which the poet has now resolved. For if action and effect are right for youth, thoughtful communication is more apt for maturity.

I sent the writings of my early years without any preface into the world and gave not the slightest indication as to what I intended by them. This occurred because I believed that sooner or later the nation would find some use in what I'd offered. As a result, several of my works had an instantaneous effect, while others, not so simple and brash, needed several years to be acknowledged. Those years did pass nevertheless and a second, and a third, successive generation repaid me two- and threefold for the incivilities I'd had to endure from my earlier contemporaries.

But this time I want nothing to obstruct a good first impression of the present book. Therefore I've decided to elucidate and explain and instruct, and to do so solely so that readers who have little or no familiarity with the East may gain a more immediate understanding. Conversely, those who are better acquainted with this utterly astonishing part of the world will have no need whatsoever of this excursus, the purpose of which is to mark, lightly enough, the springs and brooks whose quickening waters I have conveyed to my garden plot.

Still, the author of the preceding poems would like best of all to be seen as a traveller for whom it is praise enough if he adapts comfortably and sympathetically to foreign ways, both aspiring to make other forms of expression his own and understanding how to enter into and assume other ways of thinking, other customs. He may be excused if he succeeds in this only to a certain degree, if he remains recognisable as a foreigner by his accent and the ineradicable fixity of his national identity. May this little book of mine garner forgiveness in this spirit! Experts are perceptive enough to forgive while amateurs are less bothered by such shortcomings and easily accept what is offered.

So that what the traveller brings back may all the more swiftly give pleasure to his compatriots, he may take on the role of the merchant who spreads out his wares attractively and strives in various ways to make them appealing; nor will anyone begrudge him for publicising, describing and even praising his wares in his words.

First and foremost, therefore, our poet should declare that he has made clarity in both ethical and aesthetic matters his primary duty; for this reason, he has committed himself to the simplest language and the easiest, most comprehensible words in his own tongue and has only sparingly suggested that artifice and affectation by which the Oriental seeks to please.

Even so, the reader's understanding will be hampered by the use of a number of foreign words, unavoidably so; words which are obscure because they refer to specific objects, to beliefs, opinions, traditions, fables and customs. To elucidate these may be considered the next obligation and addresses a need arising from the questions and objections of German hearers and readers. An accompanying guide to the contents² indicates the page where obscure passages occur, as well as where they are explained. This explanation, however, comes in a certain context, so that, rather than incoherent notes, a self-sufficient text may emerge which, though only rapidly and loosely linked together, still may afford the reader both elucidation and a wider view.

May the effort involved in our present endeavour be congenial! We may presume to hope so. For in a period in which so much from the East has been faithfully assimilated into our language, may it seem worthwhile if we too seek, from our perspective, to draw attention to a place from which so much greatness, beauty and goodness have come to us over the centuries, and from which more is to be expected every day.

HEBREWS

For every nation a naïve art of poetry comes first and lies at the foundation of all that comes afterward. The greater the freshness and naturalness with which it emerges, the more felicitously will its succeeding epochs develop.

Since we are discussing the poetry of the East, it is necessary to consider the Bible, as the oldest such collection. A large part of the Old Testament is written in an exalted mood, and enthusiastically so, and belongs to the realm of poetry.

If we retain a lively recollection of that time when Herder and Eichhorn personally enlightened us about this, so do we call back to mind a sublime delight, comparable with the pristine sunrise in the east.³ What such men imparted and bequeathed to us can now only be hinted at, and we must hope to be pardoned for the haste with which we pass these treasures by.

Even so, for the sake of an example, we recall the Book of Ruth which with its lofty purpose of furnishing a king of Israel with lively and upstanding forefathers can be considered at the same time as the most precious tiny whole, both epic and idyllic, which has been handed down to us.

For a moment we pause too at the Song of Solomon, the tenderest and most inimitable expression of passionate and gracious love which has come down to us. Of course, we bemoan the fact that this fragmentary, jumbled and tangled poem affords no complete and pristine delight; and yet, we feel thrilled to insinuate ourselves into those very circumstances which the poet lived through. The gentle breeze of Canaan's most delightful region blows throughout: familiar rural conditions, the work of vineyard, garden and field, a little urban confinement but then a royal court with all its splendours in the background. And still the central theme continues to be the glowing attraction of youthful hearts, which search out and find one another, both rebuff and allure, under all sorts of quite simple conditions.

More than once we considered extracting some passages from this delightful confusion and setting them side by side; and yet, it is just the enigmatic and inscrutable aspect which gives these few pages their loveliness and inimitable quality. How often have not well-meaning minds, bewitched by order, been tempted to discover – or to insert – some plausible context and yet after each one the work remains as it always was.

In much the same way, the Book of Ruth has worked its irresistible charm over so many a hardy fellow so that he has devoted himself to the daft attempt to improve that incomparably laconic narration by means of more expansive and periphrastic treatment.

Thus, book by book, the Book of all books proves that it was given to us so that we might make the attempt to educate, enlighten and lose ourselves within it, as in another world.

ARABS

Among one eastern people, the Arabs, we find splendid treasures in the *Moallakat*. These were panegyrics which emerged triumphantly from the competitions of poets: poems, originating from before Muhammad's time, written in letters of gold and suspended over the portals of the House of God in Mecca. They signal a nomadic bellicose nation, rich in herds, troubled by the internal rivalries of various tribes. Depicted in these poems are: the stubbornest allegiance to fellow tribesmen, a craving for honour, valour, an unappeasable thirst for vengeance, softened by the sorrows of love, by benevolence and self-sacrifice, of limitless extent. These poems offer us sufficient sense of the high culture of the tribe of the Quraysh, from which Muhammad himself sprang, but over which he cast a sombre veil of religion and thereby sought to conceal any prospect of genuine progress.

The value of these superb poems, seven in number, is augmented by the fact that the greatest variety predominates within them. Here we can give no briefer or worthier account of them than to interpose what the judicious Jones⁴ says of their character:

The poem of Imru'l-Qays is tender, glad, glittering, graceful, diverse and lovely. Tarafa's is bold, aroused, bounding, but woven through with a certain gaiety. The poem of Zuhayr is sharp, solemn, chaste, full of moralistic injunctions and grave sayings. Labid's poem is light, amorous, gracious and tender; it calls Virgil's second *Eclogue* to mind: for it laments the pride and haughtiness of the Beloved and seizes the opportunity to enumerate her virtues in order to exalt the renown of her clan to the very skies. 'Antara's poem is proud, menacing, apposite, grand, yet not lacking in beautiful descriptions and images. 'Amr is fierce, exalted, boastful; Harith by contrast is full of wisdom, wit and dignity. The two latter poems also represent poetical and political battle orations, which were delivered before an assembly of Arabs in order to still the destructive hatred of two tribes!

Since with this snippet we'll surely prompt our readers to read or reread these poems, we now add another from the time of Muhammad, which is wholly in this spirit; its character might be described as sombre, even dark, yet glowing, hot for revenge and sated by vengeance:⁵

1

Beneath the cliff along the path
He lies struck down,
And no drops of dew trickle
Down into his blood.

2

He placed a heavy burden on me
And departed;
And yet, I shall shoulder
This burden.

3

'The heir of my vengeance
Is my nephew,
The contentious,
The irreconcilable.

4

Dumbly he sweats the venom out,
As the viper is still,
As the snake exudes its venom,
Which no charm can counteract.'

5

A terrible message came to us
Of great and mighty misfortune;
It overmastered
The strongest among us.

6

Fate has devastated me,
Wounding the friend
Whose guest
Was never harmed.

7

He was the sun's warmth
On a cold day;

And when Sirius scorched,
He was coolness and shade.

8

Lean of hip,
Not distressed,
Warm-handed,
Bold and powerful.

9

With firmness of mind
He pursued his goal,
Until he rested;
Then his firm mind rested too.

10

He was a raincloud,
Distributing gifts;
A ferocious lion
When he attacked.

11

Majestic before his people,
Black-haired, in long robes;
A lean wolf
Running against the foe.

12

Two flavours had he,
Honey and colocynth;
Dishes so flavoured
Everyone tasted.

13

He rode alone and terrifying,
No one went with him
But his sword from the Yemen
Adorned with nicks.

14

At noon we young men
began The hostile campaign,
Rode through the night
Like restless and drifting clouds.

15

Each one was a sword,
Strapped about with a sword,
But ripped from its sheath
A glittering lightning bolt.

16

They sipped from the spirits of sleep;
But when they nodded their heads
We struck them
And they were gone.

17

We took our revenge in full;
Out of two tribes
Few escaped,
The least of them.

18

And if the Hudhaylite
Broke his lance to destroy him,
It is because he broke
The Hudhaylites with his lance.

19

They laid him down
On the rough resting place,
On the steep cliff where even the camels
Shatter their hooves.

20

When the morning greeted him there,
The murdered man, in that dreary place,
He was despoiled,
His plunder pillaged.

21

But now the Hudhaylites have been
Slaughtered by me with deep wounds.
Misfortune does not cow me;
Misfortune itself is cowed.

22

The thirst of the spear has been quenched
At its first slurp
And drinking again and again
Was not forbidden it.

23

Now wine is permitted once more
Which once was forbidden;
Through heavy toil
I won that permission.

24

By sword and lance
And by my horse I won
The privilege
That now is the property of all.

25

Reach me the goblet then,
O Sawad ibn 'Amr:
For the sake of my uncle,
My body is one great wound.

26

And we handed the cup of death
To the Hudhaylites,
Whose effect is lamentation,

Blindness and abasement.

27

Then the hyenas laughed
At the deaths of the Hudhaylites,
And you saw wolves
Whose muzzles gleamed.

28

The noblest vultures flew down,
They strutted from corpse to corpse,
And so rich was the banquet spread there
They could not lift off to the heights.

Little is required for an understanding of this poem. The largeness of character, the seriousness, the justifiable cruelty of the action are genuine characteristics of the poetry. The first two stanzas offer a clear exposition; in the third and fourth, the dead man speaks and obliges his kinfolk to avenge him. The fifth and sixth are linked contextually with the first and are lyrically interchangeable; the seventh to thirteenth exalt the murdered man so that the magnitude of his loss may be felt. The fourteenth to seventeenth stanzas describe the expedition against the foe; the eighteenth turns backwards again; the nineteenth and twentieth could find a place just after the two first stanzas. The twenty-first and twenty-second could be positioned after the seventeenth; thus, the joy and savour of victory follow in the banquet, while the frightful joy of seeing the enemy struck down, a prey to hyenas and vultures, forms the conclusion.

It strikes us as quite remarkable that in this poem the purely prosaic treatment of the action becomes poetic through a transposition of the individual events. Accordingly, while the poem dispenses with virtually all exterior embellishment, its gravity is heightened; whoever reads it aright is compelled to glimpse the course of events, from beginning to end, built up bit by bit out of sheer force of imagination.

TRANSITION

If now we turn to the Persians, a peaceable and cultivated people, we must go back – since it was their poetry which in fact prompted the present work – to the earliest period, in order that we may better understand the more recent [poetry]. To the historical researcher it always seems remarkable that however often a country may have been conquered, subjugated, or even extirpated, a certain core of the nation is retained in its character and when one least expects it, an old, long-known manifestation of a people steps forth once again.

With this in mind, may it be congenial to hear of the ancient Persians and thereby all the more surely and freely guide our steps rapidly up to the present day!

For the early Parsees,⁶ worship of God was based on the observation of nature. In praying to the creator, they turned towards the rising sun as the most striking and splendid of his manifestations. There they believed to glimpse God's throne glitteringly encircled by angels. Everyone, even the lowest, could summon the glory of this uplifting service daily to mind. The poor man emerged from his hut, the warrior came forth from his tent, and the most religious of all functions was consummated. The baptismal fire was imparted to the newborn child in such rays and all day long, over an entire lifetime, the Parsee felt himself to be accompanied in all he did by that primordial star. Stars and moon – though equally unreachable, allied as they are with the unbounded – illumined the night. And yet, fire stood by, brightening and warming everyone in proportion to his means. To address prayers in the presence of this representative, to bow down before this infinitely sensitive being, was a pious and pleasant duty. Nothing is purer than a serene sunrise and with just such purity man should kindle and conserve the fire so that it be, and remain, holy like the sun.

Zoroaster seems at first to have transformed this noble pristine nature religion into a meticulous order of worship. Mental prayer, which encompasses and precludes all religions and penetrates down to the whole way of life of only a few God-favoured people, develops in most people only as the ardent and exhilarating sensation of a moment; and after it vanishes, the dissatisfied, unoccupied human being, thrown back upon himself, plunges at once into the most protracted boredom.

To fill this up meticulously with ceremonies, consecration and absolution, toings and froings, bowings and scrapings, is the duty and the prerogative of the priesthood which then century after century breaks its offices down into unending minutiae. Anyone who takes a rapid overview from the earliest, childishly delighted reverence for a rising sun to the crazed behaviour of the Guebres,⁷ as still occurs even today in India, may glimpse on the one side a fresh new nation rousing itself from sleep at the first light of dawn, and on the other, a benighted people trying to kill ordinary boredom through the boredom of piety.

Nevertheless, it's important to note that the ancient Parsees did not revere fire alone. Their religion is based on the worth of the combined elements inasmuch as they proclaim God's existence and might. From this comes the holy dread of polluting water, air and earth. Such reverence before everything which surrounds man in nature is conducive to civic virtues: attentiveness, cleanliness, industriousness are prompted and sustained. The cultivation of the land depended on this; for just as they polluted no river, so too were the canals constructed and kept clean with careful conservation of water, and from their circulation the fruitfulness of the land sprang forth, so that the kingdom of that period was cultivated tenfold more. Everything upon which the sun smiled was tended with the greatest zeal but above all, the vineyard, the sun's own closest child.

The unusual manner in which they buried their dead derives from the same extreme interdict against defiling the pure elements. The police force itself acted in accord with these principles; the cleanliness of the streets was a religious matter. Even today, when the Guebres have been driven out, thrust aside, despised and may only dwell in disreputable quarters on the city outskirts, a dying person of this denomination may bequeath a sum so that one or another street of the capitol can be thoroughly cleaned. It was through such a lively, practical worship of God that that incredible spread of population, to which history bears witness, became possible.

Such a gentle religion, based upon the omnipresence of God in His works in the sensory realm, must exert a particular influence on morals. Consider its commandments and prohibitions: not to lie, to incur no debts, not to be ungrateful! Every moralist and ascetic will easily cultivate such teachings fruitfully. For the first commandment really comprises the two others and all the rest which arise solely from untruthfulness and infidelity. For this reason in the East the devil is designated simply as the eternal Liar.

Since this religion is conducive to contemplative tranquillity, however, it can easily lead to softness, just as there is something feminine too in the long white garments. And yet, in their dispositions and manners there was also a powerful counter-effect. They bore arms, even during peacetime and in civic life, and exercised in their use in every conceivable way. The most skilful and boisterous horsemanship was customary among them; even their games – such as that played with ball and club on huge courses⁸ – kept them fit, strong and nimble, while a remorseless system of conscription turned them all, at the monarch's slightest nod, into heroes.

Let us take a retrospective glance at their sense of God. Originally the public cult was limited to a few fires and was all the more awe-inspiring; then a priesthood invested with great dignity grew by leaps and bounds and the fires too proliferated. That this profoundly inward spiritual force could occasionally rise up against its more worldly rival lies in the very nature of this perennially incompatible relationship – not to mention that the false Smerdis⁹ who ruled the realm was himself a Magus¹⁰ and elevated and supported by his colleagues for a time; so too we encounter the Magi often inspiring dread in rulers.

Dispersed by Alexander's invasion, not finding favour among his Parthian successors, again raised up and assembled by the Sasanians, they showed themselves ever steadfast to their precepts and worked in opposition to any ruler who disobeyed them. In just this way they rebelled in disgust in every way they could against both sides of the relationship between Chosroes and the lovely Shirin, a Christian.¹¹

Dislodged at last by the Arabs and driven into India, with what remained of them or their spiritual allies in Persia despised and reviled up to the present day – now tolerated, now persecuted according to the whim of a ruler – this religion still persists here and there in its pristine purity, even in wretched outposts, as the poet attempted to put into words in his 'The Legacy of Old Persian Belief'.¹²

That we are indebted to this religion for a great deal over a long stretch of time, that the possibility of a higher culture lay in it and spread over the western portion of the eastern world, is not in doubt. To be sure, it's extremely difficult to give some sense of how and where this culture extended. Many cities scattered over several regions were vital centres; however, to me the most amazing fact is that the fatal proximity of Indian idol-worship was unable to affect it. It remains striking that the cities of Balkh and Bamiyan stood so near to one another, here the wildest idols were to be seen, fabricated and worshipped on a colossal scale while there the temples of the Pure Fire were kept, large convents of devotees arose and a swarm of Mobeds¹³ gathered. Just how magnificent the furnishings of such structures must have been is attested by the extraordinary men who emerged from them: the family of the Barmakids,¹⁴ who for so long shone as influential officials, until they were at last (like a somewhat similar race of this kind in our own times)¹⁵ exterminated and expelled.

Governance

If the philosopher constructs a natural, national or governmental system of law on the basis of principles, the historically minded investigator seeks to determine how these situations and relationships have functioned over time. We discover then that in the most ancient Orient all sovereignty derived from the right to declare war. This right lay, like all else, at first in the will and fervour of the people. When one member of a tribe was injured, the remainder rose unbidden to wreak vengeance on the offender. But because the multitude can of course act and deal but cannot lead itself, it delegates leadership in battle – whether by election, custom or habit – to a single individual, either for one campaign or for several; to a truly capable man it confers that hazardous position for his lifetime and indeed, even for his posterity. Thus it comes about that the one person capable of waging a war acquires the right to declare a war.

From this circumstance flows the authority to compel, muster and summon into battle each and every citizen who can be considered willing and ready for combat. Such conscription, to be just and effective, had to be pitiless. Darius the First¹⁶ armed himself against dangerous neighbours and his vast populace responded to the hint. An elderly man delivers his three sons with the plea to release the youngest from the campaign and the king returns the boy to him hacked into pieces. The right over life and death is thus made explicit. In battle itself no questioning can be tolerated: for doesn't it often come to pass that a whole division is readily and clumsily sacrificed without anyone bringing the leader to account?

Nevertheless, among warlike peoples the same conditions occur during the brief periods of peace. It is always war in the king's circle and nobody at court can be sure of his life. Just so are taxes raised; war makes them indispensable. For this reason as well Darius Codomannus¹⁷ prudently assigned fixed regular remittances in place of voluntary contributions. On this basis and with this disposition, Persian kingship rose to supreme might and felicity, only to founder in the end through the proud nobility of a small, fragmented, neighbouring people.¹⁸

After exceptional princes had consolidated their fighting forces and brought the flexibility of the masses to its highest level, the Persians appeared dangerous even to far-flung peoples, let alone to those next door.

All were conquered; only the Greeks, disunited among themselves, banded together against the innumerable, everonrushing foe, and made exemplary sacrifice – the first virtue and the last, in which all others are implicit. In this way they gained respite so that, as Persian might toppled from within, Philip of Macedon could form a united front, gather remaining Greeks around himself and in exchange for the loss of their individual autonomy prepare for a victory over oppressors from without. His son invaded the Persians and won the empire.

They had made themselves not only dreaded but thoroughly hated by the Greek nation, for they waged war against both the state and the religion at the same time. Devotees of a religion in which the heavenly bodies, fire and the elements were revered as godlike entities in the world at large, they found it utterly reprehensible that others could confine their gods in dwelling-places and pray to them under roofs. So they torched and razed the temples and in so doing erected monuments that inspired everlasting hatred of themselves, for the Greeks in their wisdom decided never to raise the temples again out of their ashes but instead vindictively left them lying, in order to provoke future revenge. This determination to revenge their own sullied religious sites the Greeks brought with them onto Persian soil; much cruelty becomes explicable as a result, such that even the burning of Persepolis could thereby be excused.

The cultic practices of the Magians, which – far removed from their original simplicity – required temples and convents, were also destroyed, the Magians themselves hunted down and dispersed; nevertheless, many of them assembled in hiding to preserve both belief and divine service for a more propitious time. Indeed, their patience was very sorely tested. Upon the death of Alexander, his brief hegemony collapsed and the empire shattered; the Parthians seized control of the part which particularly concerns us at present. The language, customs and religion of the Greeks were native to them. And so five hundred years swept over the ashes of the old temples and altars amid which the sacred fire was kept continually glimmering, so that when the Sasanians, still professing the old beliefs, restored the earlier cult, at the beginning of the third century of our era, a number of Magians and Mobeds, who had secretly preserved themselves and their convictions along and across the border with India, at once appeared. The old Persian language was reintroduced, Greek was proscribed, and the foundation was laid again for a national identity. Now, over a period of four centuries, we discover the mythical prehistory of events in Persia preserved to some extent through echoes in both poetry and prose. This glorious dawn affords unending delight; the multiplicity of characters and happenings awakens enormous interest.

What we understand of the art and architecture of this epoch, however, seems to involve little more than pomp and splendour, magnitude and spaciousness; and how could it be otherwise, since they were obliged to derive their art from the West, itself already so profoundly debased. The poet himself possesses a seal ring of Shapur the First, an onyx, obviously incised by a western artisan of the period, perhaps a prisoner of war.¹⁹ And should the seal-carver of the conquering Sasanians have been any more skilful than the seal-carver of conquered Valentinian?²⁰ How the situation looks with the coins of that period is, alas, all too familiar to us. Even the poetic and fabulous elements of those surviving monuments have been degraded little by little into historical prose through the efforts of connoisseurs. From this example we can easily grasp how a people can stand on a high ethical and religious level, surround themselves with pomp and pageantry and yet still be considered barbarians with respect to the arts.

Nevertheless, if we are to value Oriental – and especially Persian – poetry of a later period (without exaggerating its merits to our own eventual distaste and embarrassment), we must also consider where true and estimable poetry really may be found in those times.

If one keeps India pre-eminently in view, not very much seems to have been lost from the West to the Near East; but even though that madly monstrous religion²¹ could not be acceptable in any way to worshippers of fire and the elements, any more than that abstruse philosophy would be to a person of vitality; even so there were writings of worldly wisdom from there [India] which were accepted as wholly welcome to all humanity; for the *Fables* of Bidpai²² were held in the highest esteem and thereby wrecked a future poetry in its deepest sense. From that same source we also have chess, a game which (in league with that same worldly wisdom)²³ is wholly devoted to the ruination of the poetic spirit. Keeping this presupposition in mind, we shall come to praise and admire the naturalness of the later Persian poets exceedingly (as soon as they may be invoked in a befitting context) and the way in which they struggle to sidestep and perhaps even triumph over such disadvantages.

The proximity of Byzantium, the wars with the emperors of the West, and the fluctuating circumstances which result, end up producing a mixture in which the Christian religion intertwines with that of the old Parsees, though not without remonstrances from the Mobeds and local guardians of the faith. But how many troubles, indeed the great calamity itself which assailed that outstanding prince, Chosroes Parviz, had their origin in this circumstance, all the more so because the charming and adorable Shirin held fast to her Christian faith!

All this, even considered in cursory fashion, impels us to declare that the precepts and the practices of the Sasanians are fully worthy of praise; they were simply not powerful enough to save themselves when they stood ringed about by enemies in a most turbulent time. After a decent resistance they were subjugated by the Arabs whom Muhammad had unified into a terrifying force.

MUHAMMAD

In these reflections we take poetry as our point of departure or we come back to it, and so it will suit our purpose to state from the very outset with respect to the above-named extraordinary man that he vehemently asserts and protests that he is a prophet and not a poet; furthermore, that his Qur'an is to be regarded as divine law, not as a human book meant to instruct or to entertain. Were we to indicate the distinction between poets and prophets more closely, we might say that both are seized and fired by a god. But the poet squanders the gift accorded to him in pleasure in order to bring forth pleasure, to demand honour for what he has produced and, in any event, a pleasant life.²⁴ He neglects all other goals while striving to be manifold, to reveal himself as boundless in both his nature and his self-manifestation. By contrast, the prophet considers only a single determined purpose and employs the simplest means to attain it. He means to proclaim some sort of teaching and to gather people around it as around a standard. To this end all that's needed is that the world believe; and so he must be – and remain – monothematic. For the manifold is not something one believes in, it is something one acknowledges.

The entire content of the Qur'an, to put it briefly, may be found at the beginning of the second sura and runs as follows:

There is no doubt in this book. It is a direction for the pious, who believe in the mysteries of faith, who observe the appointed times of prayer, and distribute alms out of what we have bestowed on them; and who believe in that revelation, which hath been sent down unto thee, and that which hath been sent down unto the prophets before thee, and have firm assurance in the life to come: these are directed by their Lord, and they shall prosper. As for the unbelievers, it will be equal to them whether thou admonish them, or do not admonish them; they will not believe. God hath sealed up their hearts and their hearing; a dimness covereth their sight, and they shall suffer a grievous punishment.²⁵

Thus does the Qur'an repeat itself in sura after sura. Belief and unbelief are divided into higher and lower; heaven and hell are intended for believers and deniers, respectively. The close determination of the prescribed and the forbidden, fabulous tales taken from the Jewish and Christian religions, all sorts of amplifications, endless tautologies and repetitions compose the stuff of this sacred book which, whenever we turn to it, always freshly repels us but then once again draws us to it, arouses amazement and in the end demands reverence.

Still, to express what must remain of the utmost importance in this book for every student of history, we cite the words of an eminent man:

The principal aim of the Qur'an seems to have been to bring together the adherents of the three discrete religions prevailing at that time in populous Arabia, who for the most part lived and mingled with one another day by day and who roamed without either flocks or way-markers – the majority of whom were idol worshippers and the rest either Jews or Christians of exceedingly deviant and heretical beliefs – in acknowledgement and reverence for the one, eternal and invisible God through whose might all things were made, and which could not have been so made otherwise; the supreme ruler, the judge and the lord of lords, amid the confirmation of certain laws and the outward signs of certain ceremonies – some of older and some of newer provenance – and made vivid by the depiction of both temporal and eternal rewards and punishments; and in this way to bring them all to obedience to Muhammad as the Prophet and Emissary of God, who through continually repeated reminders, promises and threats from earlier times might at last through force of arms transmit and establish God's true religion on earth, and so be acknowledged as high priest, bishop or pope in the things of the spirit, and also a lofty prince in the things of this world.²⁶

With this in mind, it's hard to be vexed by the Muslim when he terms the time before Muhammad as 'the time of ignorance', and is utterly convinced that both enlightenment and wisdom begin with the coming of Islam. The Qur'an's style is on a par with its purpose and content: strong, great, frightening, in passages truly exalted; thus it drives a wedge and no one can really be surprised at the book's huge effectiveness. For this reason it is also held by true believers to be uncreated and declared co-eternal with God. In disregard of this, however, there were some bright minds who acknowledged that a superior style of poetry and of writing belonged to the earlier period and they claimed that if it hadn't pleased God to reveal his will and a definite legal system all at once through Muhammad, the Arabs would have gradually risen to such a stage, and an even higher one, on their own and would have developed yet purer concepts in a pristine language.

Others, more audacious, maintained that Muhammad had ruined their speech and their literature so that they could never again be recovered. But the boldest of all, a brilliant poet, was rash enough to assert that everything which Muhammad had expressed he himself would have expressed as well, and better, and he went so far as to collect a number of sectarians around him. As a result, he was given the mocking sobriquet *Mutanabbi*, the name under which we know him and which means 'someone who likes to play the prophet'.²⁷

Whether or not Muslim criticism itself found doubtful matter in the Qur'an, inasmuch as passages which appeared earlier are no longer present, and others of a contradictory nature rescind one another,²⁸ along with the unavoidable lacunae which occur in all scriptural transmissions, even so, this book will remain supremely effective for all time to come, in that it is utterly practical and composed in accord with the needs of a people which bases its renown on old traditions and holds fast to customary ways.

In his aversion to poetry Muhammad also seems highly consistent; he proscribes all tales. These games of frivolous imaginative power, which float back and forth from the real up to the downright impossible, and present the improbable as worthy of truth and beyond all doubt, were extremely suited to Oriental sensuality, to soft torpor and easy idleness. Such airy fancies wafting over marvellous ground had by the Sasanian period increased beyond measure. The *Thousand and One Nights*, strung on their loose thread, provide us with examples. Their true nature is that they lack any ethical purpose and so lead and transport people not back to themselves but outward, beyond themselves, into a free space without bounds. Muhammad meant to effect exactly the opposite. It is obvious that he knew just how to transform the traditions and reports of the Old Testament and the events in the families of the patriarchs – which of course rested on unconditional faith in God, undeviating obedience (hence, in the same way, on an 'Islam')²⁹ – into legends; that he understood increasingly how to articulate and to urge belief in God, trust and obedience, with shrewd command of detail; and in so doing he came to allow much that was fabulous though only if it served his purpose. In this respect he is admirable if one looks and considers the stories of Noah, Abraham and Joseph.

CALIPHS

But to return to our actual subject, we repeat that the Sasanians ruled for four hundred years, not at the end perhaps with their former might and brilliance, and yet they might have maintained themselves for a while longer had the power of the Arabs not grown such that no other kingdom was capable of opposing them. Under 'Umar, not long after Muhammad, that dynasty collapsed which had cultivated old Persian religion and diffused an uncommon level of culture.

The Arabs at once went on a rampage against all books which in their view were merely superfluous or harmful; they destroyed all the monuments of literature so that scarcely the slightest fragments have come down to us. The Arabic language, immediately introduced, blocked any reconstruction of anything which might be termed national.³⁰ Nevertheless, here too the culture of the conquered gradually prevailed over the crassness of the conquerors; the Muslim victors took pleasure in the love of splendour, the genial customs and poetical lineaments of the vanquished. Accordingly the period when the Barmakids held sway in Baghdad still remains celebrated as the most brilliant. Originating from Balkh, not themselves monks but rather patrons and protectors of the great cloisters and cultural institutions, they preserved the sacred fire of eloquence and the art of poetry in their midst, and through their worldly wisdom and greatness of character, they claimed a high rank even in the political realm.³¹ As a result the 'time of the Barmakids' has become proverbial for a period of local and lively character and creativity which – when it has passed – one can only hope may perhaps after a long time spring up again in foreign places under similar circumstances.

The Caliphate too was of brief duration. The vast empire lasted for hardly four hundred years. The more remote governors made themselves steadily more and more independent even as they upheld the validity of the Caliph as a spiritual force conferring titles and benefices.

FURTHER OBSERVATION

No one will deny a physical and climatic influence on the formation of the human figure and its bodily qualities; and yet, it's not always acknowledged that the form of a regime also produces a moral and climatic condition through which characters take shape in various ways. We are speaking here not of the common run of humanity but of significant and superior figures.

In a republic, characters are formed which are large, felicitous and calmly committed to action. If this rises to an aristocracy, then men of consequence – worthy, adept men as admirable in taking orders as in giving them – make their appearance. Should a state plunge into anarchy, bold, reckless men, scornful of proprieties, swagger forth, resorting in a flash to violence to the point of terror and relinquishing all restraint. Despotism by contrast hews grand characters: cunning, calm oversight, severity of action, firmness, decisiveness – all the traits necessary for the service of despots develop in capable spirits and secure for them the leading positions in the state where they are formed to become rulers themselves. Such men flourished under Alexander the Great, whose generals, after his premature death, at once stepped forth as monarchs. The Caliphs became laden with a gigantic empire that they had to have administered by governors whose power and autonomy flourished as the strength of the supreme ruler was diminished. Such an outstanding man, who grasped the way to found his own empire and the way to use it, is the man of whom we now have to speak, in order to acquire some familiarity with the foundation of the new Persian poetry and its significant beginnings.

Mahmud, whose father had founded a strong kingdom in the mountains towards India just as the Caliphate sank into insignificance on the plains of the Euphrates, continued the work of his predecessor and became as renowned as Alexander and Frederick [the Great]. He allowed the Caliphate to be reckoned as a kind of spiritual power, which might well be acknowledged as to some extent to his own advantage; meanwhile he extended his realm on all sides, pressing even into India, with great force and singular success. A most zealous Muslim, he proved himself both tireless and severe in spreading his faith and destroying idolatry. The belief in one God always works to create exaltation in that it directs man back to the oneness of his own innermost being. The nation's prophet stands closer; he demands only adherence and the protocols of devotion and commands the spread of a religion which, like every other, provides scope to the partisan and sectarian mentality for endless interpretations and misinterpretations, all the while remaining at bottom the same.

So plain a worship of God had to come into the harshest opposition with Indian idol worship and incite struggle and reaction – indeed, bloody wars of attrition – in which the zeal for destruction and for conversion grew ever more intense through the capture of countless treasures. Monstrous and grimacing images, the hollow bodies of which were found to be stuffed with gold and jewels, were broken down into pieces and when quartered, despatched to deck the various portals of Muslim shrines. Detestable as the Indian monstrosities are even today to every pure sensibility, how hideous must they have appeared to Muslims with their absence of images.

Here it may not be wholly misplaced to note that the original value of each and every religion can be assessed from its effects only after the course of centuries. The Jewish religion will always diffuse a certain rigid obstinacy though accompanied as well by unrestrained cleverness and lively activity; the Muslim religion never releases its adherent from an oppressive narrowness;³² without demanding onerous obligations, it provides him with all that he may desire within its confines and at the same time, by focusing on the future, inculcates and preserves both bravery and religious patriotism.³³

Indian [Hindu] doctrine is by its very nature worthless, since now as then, its many thousands of gods – not even in any hierarchy indeed, but all of them equally powerful divinities – merely serve to complicate life's contingencies further, preaching the pointlessness of all passion and fostering the notion that vice is madness as the highest stage of sanctity and bliss.³⁴

Even a purer polytheism, like that of the Greeks and Romans, must in the end lose both itself and its adherents on false paths. By contrast, the Christian religion merits the highest praise; its pure and noble origin is efficacious in such a way that after the greatest aberrations in which muddled man can draw it, it emerges again and again, almost before one knows it, in all its loveable and unmistakable originality, as mission, as brotherhood and fellowship, to revivify man's ethical requirements.

If we approve the zeal of Mahmud the iconoclast, at the same time we grant him the countless treasures he won and revere him above all as the founder of Persian poetry and high culture. Of Persian ancestry himself, he refused to be drawn into the narrowness of the Arabs; indeed, he felt strongly that the finest basis and foundation for religion lay in national identity. This in turn relies on poetry, which transmits the most ancient tales in fabulous images, then bit by bit advances in clarity and conveys the past seamlessly into the present.

We have now arrived in our considerations at the tenth century according to our calendar. Cast a glance at the lofty level of culture which continually permeated the Orient, the exclusive aspect of its religions apart. Here, virtually against the will of weak and obstreperous rulers, the surviving vestiges of Greek and Roman achievement were gathered together along with those of so many brilliant Christians expelled from the Church for their eccentricities, since it too strove for uniformity of belief, as in Islam.

And yet, two great branches of human knowledge and action managed to operate freely!

Medicine was expected to heal the microcosm while astronomy sought to interpret all that with which the heavens menaced or caressed us for the future; the former owed reverence to nature, the latter to mathematics, and so both were well received and maintained.

Under the rule of despots the conduct of business affairs, even with the greatest attention and exactitude, was always hazardous; a member of the chancellery needed as much courage to move within the Divan³⁵ as a hero on the battle-field; the one was not more certain of seeing his hearth again than the other.

Travelling merchants brought ever new increases in both treasure and useful knowledge; the interior of the territory, from the Euphrates to the Indus, offered a world of objects all its own. A swarm of peoples in conflict with one another, rulers now ousted, now ousting others, underwent astonishing changes from triumph to servitude, from supremacy to servility, before one's very eyes and this prompted thoughtful men to utter the most melancholy reflexions on the dreamlike transience of all earthly things.

It's necessary to have all this, and much more – on the broadest scale of unending fragmentation and instantaneous recovery – firmly in view in order to be fair to the poets, and especially the Persian poets, to come. For everyone must admit that the conditions as described were in no sense propitious as a milieu in which a poet might find sustenance, might develop and prosper. We may be permitted then to treat the high merit of the earliest period of Persian poets as somewhat problematic. Even if they cannot be measured against the highest, still they must be read with indulgence and pardoned once they have been read.

POET-KINGS

Many poets gathered at Mahmud's court and were active there – a figure of some four hundred is mentioned. Since everything in the Orient is hierarchical, and must comply with higher laws, the prince appointed a prince of poets who was supposed to test and judge them and urge each one to work to the measure of his talent. This position was regarded as one of the most illustrious at the court; he was the minister of all scientific, historical and poetic undertakings. Marks of favour came to his underlings through him and when he accompanied the court, he went with so great a retinue and in such magnificent trappings, that he could easily be mistaken for a vizier.

TRADITIONS

If a person thinks about events of concern primarily to himself with an eye to leaving a report of them behind for future generations, there arises a certain sense of complacent enjoyment in the present, along with a feeling of its great value. At first he fixes in his memory what he took from his fore-fathers and he passes this on in fabulous wrappings; for oral tradition always turns into a fairy tale. With the invention of writing, however, the sheer bliss of writing grips one people after another and so there emerge chronicles which preserve a poetic rhythm long after the poetry which draws on the power of imagination and feeling has vanished. The later periods present us with extensive memorials, autobiographies under varied forms.

In the Orient too we find quite early documents, telling in their cultured worldliness. Our own sacred scriptures may have been composed in writing at a later date and yet, the traditions which prompted this are extremely ancient and cannot be considered appreciatively enough. How much, not only in the Middle East (as we may term Persia and its environs), has come into being at that moment and been preserved, despite all devastation and fragmentation.³⁶

If it's beneficial for more intensive cultivation of huge tracts of land not to be subject to a single master but parcelled out among several, the same circumstance is helpful to preservation since whatever perishes in one place can be carried forward in another, whatever is banished from this spot can take refuge in that one.

In just this fashion, notwithstanding destruction and despoilment, many copies from earlier times must have been preserved, in part copied over from one age to the next and in part remade anew. Thus, we discover that under Yazdegird, the last Sasanian, an imperial history was composed, probably assembled out of old chronicles, of the sort that Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther had read aloud to him during sleepless nights.³⁷ Copies of that work, entitled *Bustan-nameh*, still survived. Four hundred years later, under Mansur I of the Samanid dynasty, a reworking of it was undertaken which, however, remained unfinished; the dynasty itself was gobbled up by the Ghaznavids.³⁸ Mahmud, the second Ghaznavid ruler, was motivated by the same drive and parcelled out the seven sections of the *Bustan-nameh* among seven court poets. Ansari was the most successful in satisfying his master; he was named King of Poets and commissioned to rework the entire book. He was indolent and clever enough to delay the project, however, and contented himself with poking around on the sly to find somebody else to take over the work.

FIRDOWSI (DIED 1030)

The important period of Persian poetry which we have now reached offers us the opportunity to observe how momentous events in the world develop only when certain tendencies, notions and intentions, individually sprinkled here and there, quite without context, bestir themselves and silently spread until sooner or later they finally emerge fully combined to broad effect. In this respect it's remarkable enough that just at the same time that a mighty prince proposes to restore the literature of a people and its lineage, the son of a gardener from Tus makes a copy of the *Bustan-nameh* very much his own and dedicates his great natural talent fervently to such studies.

Intending to lodge a complaint against a local governor because of some hardship, he betakes himself to court, makes vain exertions for a long spell to get access to Ansari through whom his goal could be obtained if he could but call on him. At long last a profound and felicitous couplet, delivered from a staircase, brings him to the attention of the King of Poets who believing in his talent recommends him and secures a commission for him to undertake the great work. Firdowsi starts the *Shah-nameh* under favourable conditions; in the beginning he receives generally adequate remuneration but after thirty years of toil, the royal recompense scarcely matches his expectations. Embittered he quits the court and dies just as the king remembers him favourably once again. Mahmud survives him by hardly a year during which interval old Asadi, Firdowsi's master, finishes writing the *Shah-nameh*.³⁹

This work is a weighty, solemn, mythical and historical foundation for a nation; through it, the origins and existence and deeds of the old heroes are preserved. It deals with the earlier and the more recent past, so that while the genuinely historical element finally predominates, the older tales nevertheless transmit much that is true, veiled in primeval tradition.

Firdowsi appears to have been eminently suited for such a work, all the more so in that he held passionately to what was old and truly representative of his nation, and he even sought to achieve an early purity and strength with respect to language: he excluded Arabic words and took pains to pay careful attention to old Pahlavi.

He studies in Tus, a city famed on account of its imposing seats of learning and indeed, even suspected of over-refinement. As he is sitting at the gate of the college, he spots a great man riding by with his retinue and pomp; when he hears to his considerable astonishment that this is a court poet, he resolves to arrive at a comparable degree of felicity. The poem by which he won the prince's favour, and which he wrote in a night, has come down to us.

From this and from the other poems which have been made known to us there gazes forth a merry spirit, endowed with unending circumspection and a sharp and happy perspicacity, who is the master of an immeasurable store of themes. He lives in the present moment and just as he went in a flash from being a schoolboy to a courtier, so he becomes a free-wheeling encomiast, discovering that there is no higher craft than to entertain his fellow men through praise. He bedecks princes, viziers, beautiful noblewomen, poets and musicians with his praise; to each of them he applies some lovely flourish from the world's vast supply.

We think it unfair that some have turned the circumstances in which Anvari lived and the use he made of his talent into a transgression so many centuries later.⁴¹ What would become of the poet if there were not highly placed, powerful, clever, energetic, handsome and skilful men whose excellent merits he might build upon? He twines about them like the vine on the elm or the ivy on the wall, the better to refresh both his eye and his mind. Shall we chide a jeweller who spends his life turning the gemstones of both the Indies into some splendid adornment for an illustrious man? Shall we demand that he take on the occupation – highly useful, to be sure! – of a road-mender?

However propitious earth may have been to our poet, the heavens proved catastrophic for him. An [astrological] prediction which stirred up the populace, to the effect that on a certain day a tremendous storm would devastate the land, failed to materialise, and not even chess⁴² itself could save its darling from the universal indignation of both the court and the city. He fled. Even in a remote province, only the resolute character of a friendly governor protected him.

Still, the honour of astrology can be rescued if it is supposed that the conjunction of so many planets in a single sign pointed to the future and to Genghis Khan, who wreaked greater devastation in Persia than any mere storm might have done.

NIZAMI (DIED 1180)

A tender, highly gifted spirit who – since Firdowsi had exhausted all the heroic traditions – now chose the loveliest fluctuations of the deepest love as the very stuff of his poems. Majnun and Layla, Chosroes and Shirin, couples in love, are what he presents: destined for one another through presentiment, fate, nature, custom, inclination and passion, and strongly drawn to each other, they are separated by a whim or sheer stubbornness, by chance or necessity or duress, only to be somehow wondrously reunited and then, in the end, somehow or other, once again torn apart and separated.

Out of such material and its treatment the stirrings of an idealised longing awaken. For us, satisfaction is nowhere to be found. The charm is huge, the variety unending.

Even in those other poems of his which are given over to straightforward moralising, there is the same breath of gracious clarity. Whatever ambiguities may confront human beings, he always heads directly back to the practical side of things and discovers that the best solution to all puzzles lies in ethical conduct.

He led a tranquil life in keeping with his tranquil spirit among the Seljuqs⁴³ and was buried in his hometown of Ganja.⁴⁴

JALAL AL-DIN RUMI (DIED 1262)

He accompanies his father who is moving away from Balkh,⁴⁵ due to some unpleasantness with the Sultan, on the pilgrimage. On the way to Mecca they meet 'Attar, who gives a book of divine secrets⁴⁶ to the youth and fires him up for sacred studies.

Much is noteworthy here: that the true poet is summoned to assimilate within himself the world's majesty and thus is always more inclined to praise than to blame. From this it follows that he sets out in search of the worthiest object and once he has gone through all of them, finally turns his talent above all to praise and glorification of God. This need is dear to the heart of an Oriental since he is ever striving for gushing exuberance and believes to perceive this in contemplation of the Godhead in its greatest magnitude; in that endeavour no one may accuse him of exaggeration.

Even the so-called Muslim rosary, through which the name of Allah is glorified in ninety-nine attributes, is just such a litany of praise and adoration. Attributes both affirming and denying denote the most ungraspable of beings; the worshipper is amazed, he yields and finds peace. And if the worldly poet employs those perfections which hover across his mind for eminent persons, the man who has surrendered to God takes refuge in that impersonal being which permeates everything from all eternity.

So 'Attar fled from the court to contemplation and Jalal al- Din, a pure young man, who also kept his distance from princes and capitals, was all the readier to be fired to deeper studies.

After performing the pilgrimage, he travels with his father through Asia Minor and settles at Iconium.⁴⁷ There they teach, are persecuted, banished, once again restored, and there they lie buried alongside their most faithful pupils. Genghis Khan had conquered Persia in the interim but without touching the peaceful place where they sojourned.⁴⁸

In the light of this account no one will hold it against this great spirit if he tends to the abstruse. His works do look somewhat gaudy; he deals with brief histories, fairy tales, parables, legends, anecdotes, examples and problems, in order to provide access to mysterious teachings of which he himself is unable to provide any clear account. His aim is instruction and uplift but on the whole he seeks to disentangle, if not fulfil, all longing and to show, through the doctrine of Oneness,⁴⁹ that in the end everything sinks into the divine essence and is transfigured.

SA'DI (DIED 1291, AT THE AGE OF 102)

A native of Shiraz, he studies in Baghdad; as a youth he takes up the precarious life of a dervish because of an unhappy love affair. Having made the pilgrimage to Mecca fifteen times, he reaches India and Asia Minor on his wanderings, even becoming a prisoner of war of the Crusaders in the West. He survives fabulous adventures, and gains a superb knowledge of peoples and places. After thirty years he returns, revises his works and becomes known. He lives in and weaves a vast range of experience and brims with anecdotes, which he embellishes with proverbs and verses. His firm purpose is to edify his readers and auditors.

He lives well secluded in Shiraz to the age of 102 and is buried there. The successors of Genghis had made Iran a kingdom in its own right where it was possible to dwell in peace.

HAFIZ (DIED 1389)

Whoever still remembers from the last half of the previous century how amongst the Protestants of Germany not only clerics but also laymen could be found who had familiarised themselves with the Holy Scriptures so well that like living concordances, they were trained to provide a reference and context for all biblical verses and who, moreover, knew the principal passages by heart and kept them constantly on hand for any sort of application – whoever recalls this will also acknowledge that such men inevitably acquired considerable culture since their memories, occupied unceasingly with worthy objects, retained in their sensibility and judgment pure matter for both pleasure and use. They were termed ‘well-versed’ [*bibelfest*] and the designation conferred exceptional worth and unequivocal approbation.

What arose among us Christians out of natural disposition and good will was an obligation for Muslims; for while it redounded to the greatest credit of such a fellow believer to produce multiple copies of the Qur’an, or to have copies produced, it was no less meritorious to learn the scripture by heart, so as to be able to adduce apt passages on every occasion, to promote moral uplift and to smooth over conflicts. Such people were given the honorary title of *Hafiz* and this has remained the chief name which distinguishes our poet.

Now, to be sure, virtually from its very beginnings, the Qur’an as an object of the most unending interpretations provided an opportunity for exceedingly picayune subtleties; just because it aroused in everybody a need to make sense of it, vastly diverging opinions and demented conjectures – indeed, the most irrational connections of every sort – were sought, with the result that the genuinely intelligent and reasonable man had to bestir himself with great zeal simply to get back to the solid ground of the uncontaminated original text. This then is why, in the history of Islam too, we come across interpretations, applications and usages which are often astounding.

The finest poetic talent was trained and formed to just such agility; he knew the Qur’an entire and the religious edifice founded upon it was no mystery to him. He himself says:

Through the Qur’an have I done
Everything which has come to me.

As a dervish, Sufi and sheikh he taught in Shiraz, his birth-place, to which he confined himself, well liked and cherished by the Muzaffar family and its connections. He occupied himself with theological and grammatical projects, gathering a large number of students about him.

His poems stand in utter contradiction to such solemn studies and an actual teaching position, but this can be resolved by noting that a poet is not obliged to think and to live what he expresses, least of all when he falls in a later period into ticklish circumstances; when he comes close to rhetorical dissimulation and presents what his contemporaries prefer to hear. This seems to us to have been consistently the case with Hafiz. For just as a teller of fairy tales doesn’t believe in the enchantments which he represents but works only to animate them as best he can and stage them so that his auditors are swept away, even less does the lyric poet have to practise everything with which he diverts and cajoles readers and singers both high and low. Moreover, our poet seems not to have set great store by the songs which flowed so easily from him, for only after his death were they collected by his students.

We shall speak little of these poems for one should enjoy them and so arrive at some sense of unison with them. A measured, ever upwelling liveliness streams from them. Clever and gay in narrow circumstances and yet sharing in the fullness of the world, gazing from afar into the mysteries of the godhead but also refusing both religious practice and sensual pleasure – the one as well as the other – how utterly this kind of poetic art, whatever it may appear to promote and to teach, must maintain a nimble scepticism from beginning to end.

JAMI (DIED 1494, AGED 82)

Jami reaps the full harvest of the foregoing concerns and sums up the culture in its religious, philosophical, scientific aspects, as well as in its prose and poetry. He has the great advantage of being born twenty-three years after the death of Hafiz and of finding the whole field spread open before him even as a youth. The greatest clarity and level-headedness are his salient characteristics. He undertakes and accomplishes everything; he seems at once sensuous and transcendent. The splendours of the real world and of the poet's world lie before him and he moves between them with ease. Mysticism cannot hold much charm for him but without it he could not complete the circle of the national interest and so he provides a historical account of the crazy antics through which step by step the person hemmed in by his earthly nature can draw close to the Godhead and at the last believe himself to be united with it; but at the last, only unnatural and irrational, ghastly figures come into view.⁵⁰ For what else does the mystic do but slip past problems or shove them aside, if that can be accomplished?

OVERVIEW

The conclusion might be drawn, on the analogy of the very neatly ordered sequence of the first seven Roman kings, that the history we've set in place here has been cunningly and quite intentionally fabricated; against this, however, it should be noted that the seven poets who are considered the earliest by the Persians, and who gradually appear within a time-frame of five hundred years, really have an ethical and poetical relationship with one another, which might appear concocted if the works they left behind did not bear witness to its actual existence.

Still, if we consider these Pleiades more closely, insofar as it's possible for us at so great a distance, we find that all seven of them possessed a capacious talent, ever freshly reinventing itself, by which they deemed themselves to be exalted above the small number of outstanding men as well as the larger mass of middling and pedestrian talents; yet, by the same token, they ended up situated as they were in a particular time and place, in which they could happily realise a huge windfall and blunt the impact of their equally talented successors for a long time to come, until an age again appeared in which nature could once again open up new treasures to poets.

With this in mind, let us take the poets we've considered once again individually and observe that:

Firdowsi seized all the past events of the state and empire, whether historical or fabulous, so utterly that nothing remained for a successor other than allusion and annotation, not new treatment or re-imagining.

Anvari took his stand in the present. Brilliant and splendid, as nature appeared to him, he gazed, joyously gifted, at the court of his Shah; to string the two worlds – this one and the next – together in their most exquisite features, and to do so in the choicest of words, was both his duty and his delight. No one has ever done it better than he.

Nizami seized hold of all the legends of love and wonder-working which lay before him with the force of affection. The Qur'an had already shown how the most ancient, the most laconic traditions might be handled and treated to one's own specific purposes and made entertaining.

Jalal al-Din Rumi feels uneasy on the problematic ground of reality; he yearns to solve the puzzles of inward and outward phenomena by witty and spiritual means, with the result that his own works stand in need of new riddles, new solutions and commentaries. He finds himself at the last constrained to take refuge in the doctrine of Oneness of Being by which as much is lost as is gained and in the end nothing remains but a zero, as comforting as it is comfortless. How then could any communication in either poetry or prose succeed beyond this? Fortunately,

Sa'di, that excellent man, is expelled into the larger world and swamped with the numberless little facts experience accords, from all of which he is astute enough to draw something of use. He feels the need to concentrate and collect himself; he is convinced that he has an obligation to instruct others and in this way, he has become eminently profitable and beneficial for Westerners like ourselves.

Hafiz, a blithe and mighty talent, content to decline everything which human beings most crave, to set aside all that they may not dispense with, and in this way he ever appears as the merry brother of his fellow man. He can be acknowledged justly only within the sphere of his own time and place. But as soon as one has seized hold of him, he becomes a lovable life's companion. Even today, camel and mule-drivers still sing him out, hardly knowing who he is, not because of the meaning of his verses, which he himself has chopped to bits, but for the sake of the mood he forever diffuses so purely and freshly.⁵¹ Who could then succeed this poet when all else had been already taken by his predecessors? But then

Jami, equal to everything that had occurred before him and around him, wound this all together into sheaves, imitated, renewed, extended, united within himself all the merits as well as the shortcomings of his predecessors with the greatest lucidity, and he did so in such a way that to a succeeding age nothing remained possible other than to be like him, unless it were to be worse; and thus it remained for yet another three centuries. In this respect we note only that if the drama might have broken through at some point and a poet of this sort arisen, the whole course of literature might have taken another direction.⁵²

If we have ventured to describe five hundred years of the Persian art of poetry and eloquence within this small compass, let it be – to draw on the words of Quintilian, our ancient master – accepted by our friends as rounded numbers are permitted, not for the sake of more exact determination, but in order that we may express something general in an approximate and rather easygoing fashion.

MISCELLANEOUS

The fecundity and the variety of the Persian poets spring from the incalculable breadth of the outside world and its unending abundance. A public life, constantly agitated, in which all objects have equal weight, wavers before us with all the force of our imagination, and for this reason their similes so often impress us as showy and grating. Impulsively they string together the noblest and the basest images, a procedure which we find not so easy to become accustomed to.

Nevertheless, let us state it candidly: a man of the world, a man who breathes freedom of action, possesses neither aesthetic feeling nor taste; for him reality suffices in his dealings, his enjoyments, his consideration, and so too in poetry. So if the Oriental conjoins absurdities for the purpose of producing an unusual effect,⁵³ the German, in similar circumstances, shouldn't look askance.

The confusion which arises in the imagination from such productions is comparable to what we feel when strolling through an eastern bazaar or a European market fair. The priciest and the cheapest goods aren't always so far apart, they're jumbled together before us and we often note the casks and trunks and sacks in which they're carried too. Just as at a fruit and vegetable market we don't see solely herbs, roots and fruits but all sorts of peelings, husks and stalks scattered about.

The oriental poet thinks it easy as pie to whisk us from earth to heaven and from there back down again, or the reverse. Nizami knows just how to coax an ethical precept out of the stinking carcass of a dog to edify and astonish us:

Lord Jesus wandering through the world
Once went through a marketplace.
A dead dog lay across the path,
Dragged in front of the door of a house;
A crowd was gathered around the carcass
The way vultures collect at carrion [*Äser*].
One said, My brain is quite
Annihilated by this stink.
Another piped up: It doesn't take much
For the scourings of graves to bring bad luck.
Thus each one spoke in his way
To badmouth the dead dog's corpse.
But when it was Jesus's turn to speak
He spoke good sense without abuse,
He spoke from the goodness of his being:
'The teeth are white as pearls.'
His words made all those who stood about
Feel hot with shame like shells that fire burns through.⁵⁴

Everyone feels touched when the prophet, as lovable as he is astute, offers compassion and leniency in his own inimitable way. How powerfully he manages to bring the unruly crowd back to itself, to make it feel shame for its rejection and abuse, brings it to consider this disregarded excellence with acknowledgement, perhaps even with envy! For now everyone present thinks about his own teeth! Beautiful teeth everywhere, but especially in the East, are seen as a supremely attractive gift from God Himself. A putrefying creature becomes an object of admiration and the most devout consideration because of the single perfection which remains to it.

But the superb simile with which the parable concludes isn't quite so clear and forceful to us, and so we shall take the trouble to make it vivid.

In regions where limestone deposits are scarce, sea shells are used in the preparation of a much-needed building material and, layered between dry brushwood, they are set aglow with lively flame. The onlooker cannot avoid the feeling that these beings, alive in the sea, feeding and growing, not so long ago still savouring, in their own way, the universal delight in existence, are now not so much consumed by fire as transfused by its glow and attain their perfected form, even when all trace of life has been expelled. Suppose further that night has fallen and that these organic remains appear to be actually shining to the observer's eye – no more magnificent image of a deep and secret torment of the soul could be presented to the eye. Anyone who wishes to have a full glimpse of this should ask a chemist to bring oyster shells to a state of phosphorescence whereupon he will concede with us that the scalding hot sensation which pierces a man whenever a justified reproach strikes him unexpectedly in the midst of his own myopic self-regard, could not be expressed more fearsomely than this.

Such comparisons, hundreds of which might be adduced, depend upon the most immediate scrutiny of the natural and the real but at the same time they also awaken a lofty ethical sentiment which arises from a sensibility at once fresh and refined in its very foundations.

Within this unbounded breadth [of subject matter], the attention to individual detail, the keen but loving glance which strives to tease out the most characteristic aspects of a meaningful object, is pre-eminently valuable. Thus there are poetical 'still lifes' which could be set beside the works of the best Dutch artists and indeed, may be deemed superior in their ethical aspect. Precisely because of this inclination, this capability, they can never relinquish certain much-loved objects; no Persian poet ever tires of portraying the lamp that dazzles or the candle that glows. This is the cause of the monotony which some people reproach this poetry for. And yet, considered rightly, these natural things stand as surrogates for mythology; the rose and the nightingale occupy the place of Apollo and Daphne. If one keeps in mind all that was missing for them – that they had no theatre, no plastic arts – and that their poetic talent was, however, no less than anyone else's before or since, so must one who is warmly disposed to their innermost world admire them even more.

VERY MISCELLANEOUS

The loftiest aspect of Oriental poetic art is what we Germans call *Geist*,⁵⁵ pre-eminent among the higher directive faculties; all other qualities are united here without any single one asserting some intrinsic right to predominate. *Geist* belongs especially to old age or to an aging epoch. In all the poets of the East we discover a broad view of the world as it is, irony and talent given free scope. Premise and conclusion are offered us simultaneously and because of that we see too how much greater value is set upon impromptu speech. All the poets have all objects present and draw the remotest things lightly together, so that they also approach what we term 'wit'. Nevertheless, wit doesn't enjoy such esteem for it is self-seeking and pleased with itself – traits *Geist* is free from, for which reason it can – and indeed, must – everywhere be called 'genial',⁵⁶ touched by genius.

But the poet doesn't rejoice in such accomplishments all by himself; the nation as a whole is rich in wit, as countless anecdotes make clear. Through a brilliant word the prince's fury is aroused, through another word appeased. Passion and propensity live and move in the self-same element; thus do Bahram Gur and Dilaram invent rhyme while Jamil and Buthayna remain passionately linked into high old age.⁵⁷ The entire history of Persian poetry swarms with similar instances.

If one considers that Anushirwan, one of the last Sasanians, had the *Fables* of Bidpai together with chess brought at immense cost from India around the very time of Muhammad, then the condition of such an age stands fully expressed. To judge from what has been passed down to us, each person outdoes another in worldly wisdom and in independent views of earthly matters. For this reason, even four centuries later, in the first and finest epoch of Persian poetry, no wholly pure, no completely naïve freshness could come to be. The great measure of circumspection demanded of the poet, together with the upsurge of learning and the circumstances of both court and battlefield, all required the utmost thoughtfulness.

NEWER, NEWEST

Following the manner of Jami and his era, later poets mixed poetry and prose more and more, so that a single style was employed for all kinds of writing. History, poetry, philosophy, chancery documents and correspondence were all executed in the same way, and so it has continued for three centuries now. Happily we're in a position to present an example of the newest style of all.

When the Persian ambassador Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan was in St Petersburg, he was asked for a few lines in his own hand.⁵⁸ He was amiable enough to write a page which we include here in translation:

I have travelled in the whole world, I have associated with many people, every nook offered me something of use, every blade of grass a spike of grain, but even so, I've seen no place comparable to this city or its lovely hours. May God's blessing remain upon it forever!

How well did that merchant speak who fell amongst robbers all aiming their arrows at him:⁵⁹ 'A king who suppresses trade seals the gates of salvation in his army's face. What rational person could wish to visit his land, given its reputation for injustice? If you want to acquire a good name, treat merchants and envoys with respect. Great men treat travellers well in order to gain high renown. The country which does not shelter strangers soon perishes. Be a friend to strangers and travellers, since they should be considered the means to good reputation; be hospitable, cherish those who are passing through, guard against being unjust to them. He who observes this counsel of an envoy will surely draw advantage from it.'

It is related that 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz⁶⁰ was a mighty king but at night, in his little chamber, he spoke in utter humility and lowliness, and turning his countenance towards the throne of his Creator, he said, 'O Lord! You have entrusted mighty matters to the hand of a weak slave. For the sake of the majesty of the pure and the holy of Your realm, grant me righteousness and justice, preserve me from human wickedness. I fear that the heart of an innocent man might be troubled because of me and that the curse of the oppressed may lie heavily on my neck. A king should ever be mindful of the sovereignty and existence of the Highest Being, and of the continual mutability of earthly things; he should consider that the crown may pass from a worthy head to an unworthy one and not allow himself to be led by pride. For a king who is arrogant, who despises both friend and neighbour, cannot thrive for long on his throne; no one should let himself become puffed up because of a few days of fame. The world is like a fire that has been kindled along the way; he who takes what he needs to light his path suffers no evil but he who takes more [than he needs] gets scorched.'

When Plato was asked how he had lived in this world he replied, 'In pain came I into the world, my life was sustained astonishment, and I leave the world unwillingly, having learned nothing except that I know nothing.' Keep away from him who undertakes something in ignorance and from a pious man who is untutored; both of them may be likened to the ass that turns the millstone without knowing why. A sword is lovely to look upon but its effects are distasteful. A man who is well disposed associates with strangers but the man of evil intentions is estranged from his nearest and dearest. A king said to someone named Buhlul, 'Give me counsel.'⁶¹ He replied, 'Do not envy the cheapskate, nor the unjust judge, nor any wealthy man who knows nothing of household management, nor the magnanimous fellow who needlessly squanders his money, nor the scholar who is lacking in discernment. In this world one acquires either a good name or a bad one; since one can make a choice between the two, and since too everyone, good or bad, must die, happy is he who prefers the reputation of a virtuous man.'

These lines Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan, of Shiraz, wrote, in accord with the request of a friend, in the year 1231 of the Hijra, on a day of Jumada al-thani – May 1816, according to the Christian reckoning – during his sojourn in the capital St Petersburg, as extraordinary envoy of His Majesty, Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar, of Persia.⁶² He expresses the hope that an ignorant man will be forgiven with indulgence for undertaking to write a few lines.

As it is now clear from the foregoing that a certain kind of poetry and prose has persisted for some three centuries, and the style of personal and business correspondence, both in public and in private, has remained the same, so too do we learn that in more recent times there are still poets at the Persian court who hand on a chronicle of the days – hence, of all that the emperor undertakes and what then transpires – composed in verse and handsomely written, to a specially appointed archivist. In the immutable Orient, as this makes clear, since the times of Ahasuerus, who had such chronicles read aloud to him during sleepless nights, no further alteration has taken place.

We note here that such reading aloud occurs with a certain declamation, which is performed with emphases, with rising and falling tones, and must have much in common with the way in which French tragedies are declaimed. This prompts the reflection that the Persian couplet forms a comparable contrast, like the two halves of the alexandrine.

This very persistence may also be the reason that Persians still love, cherish and honour their poems after eight hundred years; we ourselves have witnessed that an Oriental regards and handles a superbly bound and preserved manuscript of the *Masnawi* with as much awe as if it were the Qur'an.

DOUBT

Still, Persian poetry, and whatever resembles it, is never accepted by Westerners purely and with complete ease; we have to be enlightened about this if our taste for [the poetry] isn't to be abruptly disturbed.

It isn't religion which distances us from this poetry. The oneness of God, surrender to His will, mediation through a prophet, all agree more or less with our faith, our way of conceiving things. Our own sacred scriptures too form a common ground if only in the shape of legends.

We've long since been made familiar with the tales, the fables, parables, anecdotes, witticisms and jokes of that region. Even its mysticism speaks to us and deserves to be compared to our own if only because of its profound and fundamental seriousness – mysticism which in more recent times expresses, when considered closely, only a vapid and mediocre yearning; it becomes a parody of itself, as this verse demonstrates:

Eternal thirst will avail me
Only after the thirst.⁶³

DESPOTISM

What can never sit well to a Western mind, however, is the spiritual and physical subjection to lords and higher authorities, which comes down from the earliest times when kings first appeared as standing in for God. In reading the Old Testament we aren't surprised whenever men and women fall on their faces before priests and heroes and entreat them for they are accustomed to doing much the same thing in the presence of Elohim. What originally took place out of natural pious sentiment changed later into tedious courtly etiquette. The kow-tow, the three-fold bow repeated thrice, comes in here. How many western envoys to eastern courts have come to grief through this ceremony! Persian poetry cannot be well received among us if we are not utterly clear on this matter.

What Westerner can tolerate the fact that the Easterner not only thumps his head nine times on the ground but even goes so far as to toss it away for any old reason whatever?

Polo, in which ball and stick play a large part, is often revived under the gaze of the ruler and the public and indeed, with direct participation on both sides. But when a poet puts his head as the ball on the polo-stick of the Shah, so that the prince will notice him and speed him forth with the polo-stick of favour, then we can't follow, nor do we wish to, either in imagination or in fellow-feeling. Here's how it runs:

How long will you, without a hand or a foot,
Continue to play Fate's polo ball?
Though you leap over a hundred courses
You cannot evade the polo-stick.
Place your head on the Shah's own course
And maybe he'll yet look at you.

And again:

That countenance alone
Is Fortune's looking-glass
That was rubbed free of dust
By the hoof of this horse.

It's not only before the Sultan but before the beloved as well that he abases himself just as deeply and even more often:

My face lay on the path,
No footstep passed it by.

*

In the dust of your pathway,
My pavilion of hope!
The dust from your foot
Is preferable to water!

*

He who stomped my bare
Skull into dust with his feet
I shall crown as a king
If only he'll come back to me.

From this it's obvious that one means about as little as the other, initially employed for a worthy occasion but then more and more frequently used and misused. Hence Hafiz can say quite buffoonishly:

My head shall be
In the dust of the landlord's path.

*

A deeper study might perhaps confirm the suspicion that the earlier poets traded more modestly in these conceits and only later poets, treading the same arena in the same language, in the end took such misuses less in earnest than in parody until the tropes dropped finally away from their objects such that no relationship could be either conceived or felt.

And so we conclude with the lovely lines of Anvari, as graceful as they are deft, which honour a worthy poet of his own time:

To the wise, Shuja'i's poems are enticing lures.
Hundreds of birds flutter hungrily about them, as do I.
Go, my poem, kiss the earth at this lord's feet and say:
You, time's virtue, are yourself an entire epoch of virtue.⁶⁴

OBJECTION

In order to clarify somewhat the relation of the despots to their subjects and what human element there may yet be in that relation, as well as perhaps to set our minds a bit at rest regarding the servile conduct of their poets, one or two passages may be interpolated here which offer testimony as to how those who know both history and the world have judged this. A thoughtful Englishman expresses himself as follows:⁶⁵

...that absolute power which is, in Europe, softened by the usages and the knowledge of a civilised age into a moderate government, has, amongst the nations of Asia, always the same character, and nearly the same course. The few shades of distinction which do exist, depend chiefly upon the personal disposition and power of the despot; and often more upon the latter than on the former: for no country can be happy or prosperous which is exposed to continual war; and that appears, from the earliest period, to have been the state of every eastern kingdom, the sovereign of which was not powerful. It follows, that the greatest happiness which the mass of the population can obtain under such a government must have its source in the power and fame of the monarch, and the comparative blessings which his subjects enjoy form the substantial ground of their pride in such rulers. We must not, therefore, solely refer to base and venal motives, that flattery which they bestow on them. Insensible to the value of liberty, and ignorant of all other forms of government, they naturally prize that state of their own in which they find they have most security and enjoyment: and they are not only content, but proud to humble themselves before one exalted man, when they see, in the magnitude of his power, a certain refuge against more intolerable and oppressive rules.

So too, an intelligent and knowledgeable German reviewer says:⁶⁶

The author, himself an admirer of the lofty flights of the panegyrists of this period, nevertheless rightly faults the noble minds squandering their power in an excess of encomia as well as the debasement of character which usually follows as a consequence. But it must be noted too that in the artistic edifice of a truly poetic people, decked out in manifold adornments of rich achievement, panegyric poetry is as essential as satiric, to which it forms merely a counterpart, and its dissolution leads straightaway into either moralistic poetry – that unruffled judge of human virtues and failings and guide to the final goal of inmost tranquillity – or into the epic, which with impartial audacity sets the highest human excellence alongside life's sheer ordinariness – no longer as something to be rebuked but as contributing to the whole – and reconciles both extremes and unites them in a single pure image of existence itself. If it befits human nature, and is a sign of its higher origin, that it seizes enthusiastically upon what is noble in human endeavour and its higher perfection, and by contemplating this simultaneously renews its inner life, then the praise of power and might, as it shows itself in princes, is also a splendid phenomenon in the realm of poetry, and it has fallen into disrepute among us – and quite rightly so – simply because those who devoted themselves to it have been for the most part not poets but merely money-grubbing sycophants. And yet, who, hearing Calderon praise his king, when the boldest surge of fantasy sweeps him away, can think of praise put up for sale? Or who might gird his heart against Pindar's victory hymns? If the despotic nature of Persia's crown had its counterpart at that time in a shared adoration of power amongst the majority of those who sang the praises of princes, even so, through the conception of enlightened power which it engendered in noble spirits it inspired many poems worthy of posterity's admiration as well. And just as the poets are still worthy of this admiration today, so too are those princes through whom we discover a genuine acknowledgement of human dignity as well as a passion for the art which celebrates their memory. Anvari, Khaqani, Zahir Faryabi and Achestegi are the poets of this period in the field of panegyric whose works are still read with delight in the Orient so that their noble names still stand proof against any disparagement.⁶⁷ A proof of how close the striving of the panegyric poet borders on the highest demand which can be made of a human being lies in the sudden shift of one of these poets, Sana'i, to religious poetry: now, after he has learned to locate a sense of the supremely Exalted – which he was once happy enough to seek in life – far beyond this sphere of existence, he turns from being a panegyrist of his prince into an impassioned singer of God alone and His eternal perfection.

ADDENDUM

These reflections of two serious and thoughtful men will incline us towards leniency in passing judgement on Persian poets and encomiasts while at the same time confirming what we stated earlier: namely, that in a perilous time, everything in government depends on whether a prince not only protects those who are beneath him but is also capable of leading them in person against the foe. Ancient examples can be adduced for this truth which is constantly being confirmed up to the present day; as when we cite the fundamental principle of rule which God imparted to the Israelites, to their general approval, at the very moment when they asked once and for all to have a king over themselves. This 'constitution', which certainly seems pretty odd to us nowadays, we here set down verbatim:⁶⁸

And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants.

When Samuel now tries to impress on his people the dubious nature of such a covenant and to dissuade them from it, they cry out with one voice:

Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

It is in just this sense that the Persian says:

With word and sword he compasses and safeguards the land;
But he who compasses and safeguards is himself held in God's hand.⁶⁹

In forming judgement on various forms of rule there's a general tendency not to pay enough attention to the fact that in all of them, whatever they may be called, freedom and servitude exist as simultaneous extremes. If power is in the hands of a single man, the populace is servile; if power is in the hands of the many, the single man is at a disadvantage; moreover, this fluctuation continues at every stage until a balance, short-lived as it must be, is struck somewhere. This is no secret to the historian; and yet, no one can see this with any clarity amid life's tumultuous moments. Never is there more talk of freedom than when one party wants to subdue another and then nothing further is considered except that power, influence and property pass from one hand to another. Freedom is the softly spoken watchword of those who break their promises in secret, the loudly bellowed battle cry of open revolutionaries; indeed, it is the buzz-word of despotism itself in leading its oppressed masses against the foe while holding out the promise of freedom for all time from foreign domination.

COUNTER-ACTION

And yet, not to give in to such a generally slanted view, we prefer to travel back to the Orient and observe how human nature, ever unconquerable, resists pressure from outside; and so we discover that the free and stubborn sense of self of individuals everywhere forms a counterweight to the all-powerful One; they may be slaves but they are not subjugated, they permit themselves incomparable audacities. To adduce an example from more ancient times let's proceed to an evening banquet in the tent of Alexander where we come upon him in lively, vehement, indeed boisterous colloquy with one of his own.

Cleitus, Alexander's foster brother, his companion in war and in play, loses two brothers on the battlefield, saves the king's life, appears as a general of note, the loyal governor of important provinces. He cannot go along with the divine status arrogated by the king; he has witnessed his advance, he has known him needy of both service and aid; he may even cultivate an aversion, born of bitterness, to overestimating his achievements.

The table talk at Alexander's festive board may always have been quite significant; his guests were all accomplished and cultured men, all of them born at a period when eloquence in Greece was at its height. It was customary to propose, choose or quite accidentally hit upon weighty problems and to bat these back and forth in a consciously sophistical and rhetorical fashion. But then when someone rose in defence of the party to which he himself was attached, drunkenness and passion mounted by turns and in the end it had to result in violent scenes. It is along just such lines that we come upon the suspicion that the conflagration of Persepolis didn't come to pass simply out of coarse daft braggadocio⁷⁰ but rather was kindled at just such a dinner-table exchange, in which one party argued that one ought to spare the Persians since they'd already been conquered, while the other, by contrast, bringing the remorseless behaviour of the Asians in destroying Greek temples once again before the company's eyes and intensifying the madness in a drunken rage, reduced the old royal monuments to ashes. The fact that women took part – and they are always the fiercest and most implacable enemies of their enemies – renders our suspicion even more likely.

Nevertheless, should anyone remain a bit dubious on this subject, we're all the more certain about what occasioned the fatal schism at the banquet which we mentioned earlier; history preserves it for us. To wit, that it was the conflict, perennially repeated, between youth and age. The elders, on whose side Cleitus argued, could refer to a consistent sequence of deeds which they had carried out tirelessly, with both strength and wisdom, in fidelity to the king, the country and the goal proposed. The young, on the other hand, took it as a given that all that had occurred, that much had been accomplished and that they stood at that moment at the borders of India; and yet, that brought to mind how much yet remained to be accomplished, comparable deeds waited to be performed and with the promise of a glittering future they thought to obscure the glory of past achievements. That the king took this side is natural enough for there could be no question of past action in his case. Cleitus, by contrast, revealed his secret indignation and in the king's presence, he repeated malicious remarks which had earlier come to the prince's notice as things spoken behind his back. Amazingly, Alexander maintained his composure but, alas, a bit too long. Cleitus overstepped the limit in fractious comment until the king leapt to his feet; at first those nearest him restrained him and took Cleitus aside. But Cleitus came back raging with fresh calumnies and Alexander, seizing a spear from a guard, struck him down.⁷¹

What next transpired doesn't really belong here; we note only that the bitterest lament of the despairing king consisted of the observation that in future he would live alone like a beast in the forest since henceforth nobody would dare to utter a free word in his presence. This remark, whether it's the king's or the historian's, confirms what we suspected earlier.

In the previous century it was still possible for a person to contradict the Persian emperor at festive meals, and to do so unabashedly – though, to be sure, the dinner companion who was overly bold would be dragged away by the feet and as he was hauled past him the monarch might be asked whether he might just possibly pardon him? If not, then out with him, and beaten to a pulp!

Just how boundlessly stubborn and refractory favourites could behave against the emperor has been reported to us by credible historians and handed down in anecdotes. The ruler is like fate, relentless, and yet he inspires defiance. In the face of this, strong natures sink into a kind of madness, the most amazing instances of which could be presented.

Even so, temperate, firm, consistent natures subordinate themselves to the supreme power, from which everything cascades – benefit as well as suffering – so that they may live and act as they wish. But the poet who values his talent has to dedicate himself to the first, and Highest, cause. At court, in converse with the great, he finds that a perspective on the world opens wide to him and he needs this to get to the rich abundance of all subjects. Here lies not merely the excuse but the justification for the flattery, which is appropriate for the panegyrist who practises his craft at its best when he is laden with a profusion of sheer stuff with which to deck out princes and viziers, maidens and youths, prophets and saints, indeed, the Godhead itself, in brimmingly human fashion.

We too praise our Western poet when he heaps up a whole world of frippery and finery⁷² to glorify the image of his beloved.⁷³

INTERPOLATED

The circumspection of the poet addresses itself really to form, the world gives him the stuff all too generously, the content springs on its own out of the fullness inside him; both come together unconsciously and at the end no one can tell to whom the riches truly belong.

Form, however, though it lies above all in the genius, needs to be known and considered, and here caution is required, so that form, matter and content correspond to one another, fuse together and interpenetrate.



The poet stands far too high to form a party. Gaiety and awareness are the lovely gifts for which he thanks the Creator: Awareness, that he not be fearful in the face of the dreadful; gaiety, that he know how to represent all things with delight.⁷⁴

PRIMAL ELEMENTS OF ORIENTAL POETRY

In the Arabic language there are few stems or root-words which do not relate to camels, horses and sheep, if not directly, then by means of a slight twist or shuffle. We really can't call these expressions, drawn originally from nature and from life, 'tropes'. Everything which man naturally and freely utters bears upon his actual life; and the Arab is as deeply attached to camel and horse as the body is to the soul; he encounters nothing whatsoever which does not simultaneously affect these creatures too and bind their being and their actions vitally to his own. If in addition to the aforementioned creatures, the other wild and domestic animals which appear frequently enough to the gaze of the freely wandering Bedouins are taken into account, these too have an impact at every point in their lives. Should you stride out and look at all the rest that's visible – mountain and desert, cliff and plain, trees, grasses, flowers, river and sea as well as the firmament filled with stars – you will discover that to the Oriental each thing leads to everything else in his mind, so that, accustomed as he is to weaving together the most distant things, he requires little thought to bring forth one contradiction after another out of the tiniest shift of letter or syllable. From this it is evident that language is productive in and by itself. Indeed, in so far as it meets thought halfway, it is eloquent; in so far as it accords with the imagination, it is poetic.

Therefore, he who, starting from the very earliest, most primal figures [*Ur-Tropen*], has identified the boldest and freest, until at last he arrives at the most daring, the most capricious – nay, even the clumsiest, most conventional and hackneyed – has gained an unimpeded overview of the main pinnacles of Oriental poetry. At the same time, however, he'll be easily persuaded that there can be no question in that literature of what we term 'taste,' that is, of the separation between the decorous and the indecorous. Its virtues cannot be separated from its flaws, they are connected with each other, they emerge one from the other, they must be assessed as they are, with neither quibbles nor carping. Nothing is more insufferable than when Reiske and Michaelis hoist these poets into the high heavens at one moment and then, at the next, treat them like dim-witted schoolboys.⁷⁵

In this regard it's striking to note that the earliest poets who lived amid impressions drawn from the very sources of nature and who formed their language poetically, must have had very considerable advantages; those who arrive in a more self-conscious time, under complicated circumstances, certainly display the same striving but steadily lose track of what is laudable and correct. For when they snatch at figures which are more and more far-fetched, sheer nonsense results and in the end, nothing is left but the broadest conception, under which objects can all be jumbled together, the conception which gazes at all and in so doing, abolishes poetry itself.

TRANSITION FROM TROPES TO SIMILES

Since all that's been said so far holds true as well for closely related comparisons, a few examples may serve to confirm our assertion.

The hunter glimpsed waking up in the open field compares the rising sun to a *falcon*:

Life and action penetrate my breast,
I stand firmly on my own two feet again:
For the golden falcon, on broad pinions,
Hovers above his azure nest.

Or, more splendidly still, to a *lion*:

The mists of daybreak became bright again,
Heart and mind were all at once made glad
When the night, that shy gazelle,
Fled from the lion of the morning's threat.

How could Marco Polo who witnessed all this, and more, not have been astonished by such comparisons!⁷⁶
We constantly find the poet writing playfully of curls.

More than fifty baited lines
Stick in every lock of your hair...⁷⁷

is adorably directed at a lovely head with a profusion of locks and the poetic imagination doesn't balk at conceiving of the tips of the hair as little hooks. Still, when the poet says that he is hanged on hairs, this doesn't strike us as quite right. When it refers to the Sultan,

In the ribbons of your curls
The enemy's throat is choked,

the imagination is presented with either a repellent image or indeed, none at all.

That we are slain by *eyelashes* may well pass muster, but to be 'speared by eyelashes' cannot appeal to us; moreover, when eyelashes, compared to brooms, sweep the stars down from the sky, this seems a bit too gaudy for us. The *brow* of the beauty as the heart's grindstone; the lover's *heart* as rubble rolled and rounded by torrents of tears; these and similar gambits – mere wit without much feeling – oblige us to little more than a friendly smile.

Even so, when the poet treats an opponent in chess as mere tent-paraphernalia, the results can be quite brilliant:

May you always be splintered like chips! Ripped like rags! Hammered like nails and thrust in like pegs!

In this we glimpse the poet at headquarters; the endlessly repeated setting up of the tents, and striking them down again, hovers before his soul.

From these few examples, which could be multiplied endlessly, it's clear that no boundary can be drawn between what might be termed laudable and what reprehensible in our sense, simply because all their merits are really the products of their faults. Should we wish to share in the productions of the loftiest minds, then we must 'orientalise' ourselves; the Orient won't come calling on us. And even though translations are much to be praised for enticing and guiding us, it must be obvious from all that's been said earlier that in this literature, language as language plays the central role. Who wouldn't want to be familiar with these treasures at their source!

Keeping in mind that poetic technique exerts the greatest influence on every manner of poetry, and necessarily so, we note here as well that the double-rhymed verse of Orientals promotes a parallelism which, however, tends to disperse rather than concentrate the mind, all the more so in that the rhyme indicates two quite disparate objects.⁷⁸ Because of this their poems display something in the nature of a mish-mash, or prescribe end-rhymes in which, true enough, the most gifted poets were stimulated to achieve the highest excellence. How severe a judgment the nation has imposed in this matter appears from the fact that in five hundred years it has recognised only seven poets as supreme.

ADMONITION

We might easily invoke everything which we've expressed up till now in well-intentioned witness against oriental poetry. For this reason we make bold to offer men whose truly intimate and direct knowledge of these regions is acknowledged with an admonition consistent with our aim of averting all possible prejudice on so excellent a subject.

Comparisons make it easier for everyone to form a judgment but they make it harder too. For when a comparison is taken too far and falters, a comparative judgment becomes even more inapposite the closer one considers it. We don't mean to overdo this but merely to say in the present instance that whenever the estimable Jones compares oriental poets with Greek and Latin poets, he has his reasons; the connection with England and its scholars of antiquity oblige him to do this. Formed himself in the strict classical school, he is well aware of the exclusionary prejudice that nothing is of any value except for what Rome and Athens have bequeathed us. He knew, he cherished, he loved his Orient and he wanted to introduce Old England to its products by, as it were, slipping them in, which could be accomplished only under Antiquity's seal of approval. Nowadays this isn't needed at all; in fact, it's harmful. We understand how to appreciate Oriental poetry, we acknowledge what's excellent in it; but let's compare it with itself, let's honour it within its own sphere and in that way forget that the Greeks and the Romans ever existed.

It can't annoy anybody if someone is reminded of Horace whilst reading Hafiz. On this subject, a connoisseur has declared himself in such a marvellous manner that this relation has now been spelled out and is done with once and for all. Here's what he says:

In their views on life, the similarity of Hafiz to Horace is striking; it can be explained only through the similarity of the ages in which both poets lived in which, because of the destruction of all security in civic life, man was confined to a fleeting enjoyment of life, snatched in the instant of its passing.⁷⁹

What we do entreat is that Firdowsi not be compared with Homer because he must show to disadvantage in every sense: in subject matter, form and treatment. Whoever wishes to be persuaded of this needs only compare the dreadful monotony of the seven adventures of Isfandiyar with the twenty-third book of *The Iliad* where the most varied prizes are won by the most diverse heroes in the most disparate ways at the funeral rites of Patroclus. Haven't we Germans inflicted the greatest damage on our own magnificent *Nibelungenlied* through such comparisons? As supremely pleasing when properly lodged within their own sphere, where they can be snugly and appreciatively integrated, such works appear all the odder when they are measured according to a standard which should never be applied to them.

The same is true of the work of an individual author who has written much for a long time and in the most varied manner. Leave it to the clueless rabble to praise, to single out and to reprove by using comparisons. But those who would instruct a people must take a position from which a distinct and universal overview replaces sheer uninformed judgment.

COMPARISON

Having rejected all comparisons in forming a judgement on a writer it will occasion amazement if we speak, right off the bat, of one instance in which we find comparison reliable. Even so, we hope that we'll be permitted this exception, since the idea belongs not to ourselves but to a third party.

A man steeped in the breadth, the heights and the depths of the East is of the opinion that no German writer has come closer to eastern poets and other authors than Jean Paul Richter.⁸⁰ This opinion struck us as too significant for us not to devote appropriate attention to it; moreover, we're able to convey our observations on the subject all the more easily since we can refer back to all that we've previously elaborated in such detail.

To be sure, taking personality as our starting point, the aforementioned friend's works testify to a sensible, attentive, perceptive, informed, cultured – and as such, benevolent – and pious mind. So talented a spirit gazes about his world in a bold and lively – a genuinely Oriental – manner, forges the oddest connections, reconciles the incompatible but in such a way that a secret ethical thread is woven into it so that the whole thing is brought to a kind of unity.

If we've pointed out and delineated the natural elements from which the oldest and the best of the Oriental poets composed their works, we'll now explain ourselves more clearly by saying that whereas those poets worked in a fresh and simple region, our friend, by contrast, lives and works in a cultured, over-refined, excessively sophisticated, baffling world and for that very reason, has to be prepared to marshal the strangest elements. To illustrate the opposition between the milieu of a Bedouin and that of our author in a brief but vivid way, we extract the most telling expressions from a few pages:

Border treaties, supplementary pages, cardinals, side-alcove, billiards, beer mugs, national banks, sessional chairs, principal commissary, enthusiasm, sceptre-tail, breast pieces, squirrel-farmer, stockjobber [*Agioteur*], mudlark, incognito, colloquia, canonical billiard sack, plaster cast, advancement, apprentice blacksmith [*Hüttenjunge*], naturalisation file, Whitsun programme, Masonic, hand pantomime, amputated, supernumerary, jewellery stand, Sabbath way, etc.⁸¹

If these assembled expressions are familiar to a cultured German reader, or could be familiar through a dictionary, just as the outer world becomes known to an Easterner through caravans of merchants and pilgrims, so may we boldly take it as justified for a kindred spirit to put the same procedure to work in an utterly different context.

Should we acknowledge as well to our own author, as prolific as he is cherished, that living at a later period, he is obliged – if he wishes to shine in his own day – to play upon a state-of-affairs which has become so endlessly complicated and fragmented through art, science, technology, politics, the wages of peace and of war, as well as decline, in the most varied fashion – should we do so, we think to have confirmed him in the Oriental qualities attributed to him in a fully satisfactory manner.

Even so, we will isolate a difference, a difference in procedure in both poetry and prose. A poet, before whom rhythm, parallelism, the placement of syllables and rhyme seem to stand as the greatest obstacles in his path, turns this all to the most decisive advantage if he can successfully solve the conundrums which have been set before him or which he has set himself; we forgive the most reckless metaphor for the sake of an unexpected rhyme and we delight in the resourcefulness which the poet can claim in a position so constrained by necessity.

By contrast, the prose writer has a lot of elbow room and has to answer for every risk he permits himself; he is called to account for everything which might offend taste. But, as we've shown in some detail, since it's almost impossible to separate the proper from the improper in this sort of writing and versifying, here it all comes down to the individual who ventures on such a daredevil course. If it's a man like Jean Paul, a talent to be esteemed, a man of worth, then the reader feels drawn to him fondly at once; everything is permitted as well as welcome. You feel at ease in the presence of such a benevolent fellow; his feeling spreads out amongst us. He stimulates our imaginations, he flatters our failings, he firms up our strengths.

One exercises one's own wit in seeking to solve the marvellously proffered riddle, and delights in a gaudily circumscribed world, as though behind it there were charades and entertainments, excitement and strong emotion, and even moral uplift, to be discovered.

This is pretty much what we wanted to present to justify that comparison [between Jean Paul and Oriental poets]. We strove to express the points of similarity and of dissimilarity as concisely as we could; such a text could lead to limitless elaboration.

PROTEST

If someone regards word and utterance as sacred witnesses, and not as loose change or cash to be produced for a quick momentary exchange, but means to proffer them as genuine equivalents in an exchange of the spirit, then no one can fault him for drawing attention to how conventional expressions, which everyone finds unobjectionable, still can exercise a malign influence, obfuscate ideas, distort concepts and impart a false direction to entire disciplines.

The usage which has been introduced under the heading 'Fine Arts of Speaking'⁸² may well fall into this category, when treated as a general rubric under which both poetry and prose, according to their various divisions, may be ordered, one after the other, and grasped.

Regarded purely and accurately, poetry is neither discourse nor art. It isn't discourse because it demands measure, melody, bodily movement and mimicry to be complete. It isn't an art because all depends upon naturalness which, to be sure, may be orderly but may not be artificially fussed and worried over; it remains forever the genuine expression of a spirit stirred into exaltation without purpose or goal.

But eloquence in its true meaning is a discourse and an art. It depends upon a clear, moderately passionate *discourse* and it is *art* in every respect. It pursues its objectives and is dissimulation from start to finish. Poetry has been degraded by that rubric, which we reject, in that it becomes assigned if not subordinated to rhetoric, and both its name and its honour are taken from it.

This designation and classification have of course won both approval and status because quite estimable books bear it on their brows, and it would be hard to leave off using it right away. And yet, such a state of affairs comes to pass because in classifying the arts, the artist is not consulted. For the professional literary man, poetical works arrive initially as letters of the alphabet, they lie before him as books which he is called upon to order and arrange.

GENRES

Allegory, ballad, cantata, didactic poem, drama, elegy, epic, epigram, epistle, fable, héroïde, idyll, novel, ode, parody, romance, satire, tale.

If somebody set out to draw up a methodical arrangement of the aforementioned genres (which we've listed alphabetically), along with any number of others, he'd encounter major difficulties which are hard to sidestep. If you look more closely at the above categories, you'll find them so dubbed, now because of certain outer characteristics, now because of their content, but very few as a result of an intrinsic form. You note right away that some of them stand side by side while some are subordinate to others. With respect to pleasure and taste everyone can easily decide for himself; however, if a rational arrangement is needed for didactic or historical purposes, it's worth the trouble to look around for such a thing. Accordingly we offer the following for consideration.

NATURAL FORMS OF POETRY

There are only three true natural forms of poetry: the clearly narrative, the passionately excited, and that which deals with persons – Epic, Lyric and Drama. These three forms of poetry can work together or separately. They often occur together in the tiniest poem and through this conjunction in the smallest space they produce the most splendid figure, as we perceive clearly in the most precious ballads of all peoples. In the older Greek tragedy we see all three brought together, diverging from each other only in a specific sequence. As long as the chorus plays the protagonist, the lyrical is on display; as the chorus becomes more of a spectator, the others emerge and finally, when the action draws persons and place together, the chorus turns uneasy and grating. In French tragedy, the exposition is epic, the middle dramatic and the fifth act, which unfurls with passion and fervour, can be called lyrical.

The Homeric heroic poem is pure epic. The rhapsode presides, he recounts what takes place; no one to whom he hasn't granted the word beforehand, whose discourse and response he has not announced, may open his mouth. Broken exchanges of dialogue, the drama's loveliest embellishment, are not allowed.

Should one, however, hear a modern improviser in a public square who deals with an historical event: first, he will engage in narrative, so as to be clear; then, to stir up interest, he'll speak as one of the characters of the action; finally, he will blaze with enthusiasm and sweep peoples' spirits away. To intertwine these elements is so wondrous, and the poetic forms are infinitely varied; for that very reason, it is so difficult to find the order by which they can be arranged alongside or after one another. A certain measure of assistance can come from placing the three principal elements over against one another in a circle and then looking for models in which each of the elements predominates singly. Examples can then be collected as they incline towards one side or the other until at last the combination of all three takes place and the whole circle is thereby closed upon itself.

In this way it's possible to gain fine insights into genres as well as into the character and the taste of nations in a chronological sequence. And although this approach may be more apt for one's own instruction, entertainment and measurement than for the instruction of others; yet one still may thereby establish a schema which at one and the same time represents the outer and incidental forms and the inner and necessary first stirrings in a comprehensible manner. Even so, the effort will always be as difficult as is the attempt to discover the relationship in the natural sciences between the outer characteristics of minerals and plants and their innermost components, so as to represent to the mind an order commensurate with nature.

ADDENDUM

It is worthy of note that Persian poetry has no drama. Had a dramatic poet been able to emerge, its whole literature would necessarily have worn a different aspect. The nation has a tendency to quietude; it likes to hear tales recited, hence the abundance of stories and poems beyond count. Then too life in the East isn't much given to chat about itself; despotism doesn't encourage conversation and we find that every objection to the will and command of the ruler emerges in any case only in quotes from the Qur'an and well-known passages of poetry, which however presupposes an ingenious mind, with breadth, depth and the fruits of education as well. Nevertheless, that the Oriental may dispense with the forms of conversation as little as any other people is evident in his high esteem for the *Fables* of Bidpai, and for the repetition, imitation and continuation of these. *The Parliament of the Birds* of Farid al-Din 'Attar provides the loveliest example of this.

THE BOOK-ORACLE

The person trapped in the sombre quotidian who scouts around for a brighter future snatches greedily at coincidences in order to scrabble out any kind of prophetic intimation. The indecisive man discovers his salvation only in the resolve to submit to the pronouncement of the lot that's cast. To this category belongs the universally practised convention of seeking an oracle from a significant book, between the pages of which one places a pin and then gazes credulously at the passage indicated when the book is opened. We were once closely associated with people who sought trustworthy advice in just such a manner from the Bible, the *Schatzkästlein*,⁸³ and other edifying works, and often got solace in the sorest need, nay, they were fortified for a lifetime.

We find this custom practised in the Orient too; it is called *fal* and the honour of the practice fell to Hafiz immediately after his death.⁸⁴ At the time, the strictly orthodox didn't want to accord him proper obsequies; his poems were consulted and since the passage indicated mentioned that wanderers would honour his grave, the conclusion was drawn that he too had to be honourably buried. The Western poet plays on this practice as well and hopes that a comparable honour may befall his own book.⁸⁵

THE EXCHANGE OF FLOWERS AND SIGNS

In order not to posit some exaggerated goodness in the language of flowers or expect something steeped in tender sentiments, we have to let ourselves be instructed by those in the know. Individual flowers weren't accorded a meaning so that they could be gathered up and proffered as a bouquet of secret script, nor was it solely flowers which formed words and letters in such a mute colloquy, but rather, everything visible, everything conveyable, was employed to equal effect.

Nevertheless, we can imagine how such a thing might happen, how a communication, an exchange of feelings and thoughts, might be produced, only if we keep the chief aspects of Oriental poetry firmly in view; namely, that broad, encompassing gaze over all the things of this world, the facility in rhyming, but also a particular delight in riddles – and a native proclivity for them – whereby an adeptness at solving riddles takes shape, as is obvious to everyone whose talent tends to the cultivation of riddles based on syllables and letters and the like.

To be noted here is that when a lover sends a beloved any kind of object, the recipient has to utter the word and then seek a rhyme for it; and yet, what might be spotted which would be suitable for the present situation amid all the possible rhymes? It's immediately apparent that an impassioned guesswork must prevail in this situation. One example can clarify the matter; hence, the little love story that follows in this connection.

The watchmen have been stalled
 By sweet gratuities;
 But how we've come to terms
 We wish to disclose to others;
 For, Sweetheart, what brought us joy
 Must avail others too,
 And so we will rub clean
 The dark lamps of the night of love,
 And whoever then succeeds with us
 In tuning a sensitive ear,
 And loves as we do, will find it light
 To rhyme to the proper sense.
 I sent to you and you sent to me
 And we both understood at once.

Amaranth	I saw and I burned! ⁸⁶
Rue	Who saw?
A tiger's hair	A bold warrior
Hair of gazelle	At what place?
A lock of hair	You should know it
Chalk	Keep away
Straw and hay	I'm ablaze (with love)
Grapes	Will allow it
Coral	I could like it
Almond-kernel	Very gladly
Beet-root	You'll make me sad
Carrot-sticks	You mean to mock me
Onions	What are you grumbling about?
White grapes	What must that mean?
Purple grapes	Should I trust?
Twitch-grasses	You mean to tease me
Carnations	Must I wilt?
Narcissi	You must know it
Violets	Wait a little bit
Cherries	Do you want to shame me?
Feather of raven	I have to have you
Feather of parrot	You must let me go
Chestnut	Where will we dwell?
Lead	I am there
Rose-tint	Joy is dead
Silk	I suffer
Beans	I'll spare you
Marjoram	It doesn't concern me
Blue	Don't take it literally
Grape	I believe
Berries	I'll refuse it
Fig	Can you keep quiet?
Gold	I like you
Leather	Use the feather
Paper	So am I to you
Marsh-marigold	Write as you will
Violins by night	I'll have it fetched
A thread	You're invited
A twig	Don't joke
Bouquet	I'm at home
Winds	You'll find me
Myrtle	I'll entertain you
Jasmine	Take me there

Garden balm	***on a cushion
Cypresses	I'll forget it
Bean blossom	You false of mind
Lime	You're a scamp
Coals	May the *** take you

And had Jamil not come to terms
With Buthayna in this way,
How could their names not be today
As fresh and glad as once they were?

The foregoing odd manner of communication is something quickly put into practice amongst lively people who are attracted to each other. As soon as the mind takes such a tack it performs wonders. One story out of many possible will serve as proof.

Two loving couples take a pleasure trip of several miles and spend a happy day together. On the way back they amuse themselves by playing word-games. Not only is each one guessed as soon as it's uttered but in the end, even the word which the other has in mind and is just about to turn into a riddle is recognised and uttered by a process of instantaneous divination.

In as much as the very same thing is recounted as well as affirmed in our own times, one need not be afraid of appearing ridiculous, since such psychic phenomena still remain far from the attainment of what organic magnetism has brought to light.⁸⁷

CIPHERS

But there's another way of making oneself understood which is both witty and sincere! If in the preceding, ear and wit were at play, here there is a tenderly affectionate aesthetic sense which stands on a par with the loftiest poetry.

In the Orient the Qur'an is learned by heart and as a result, the slightest play on its suras and verses affords quick comprehension amongst its adepts. We've experienced the same thing in Germany where fifty years ago, education was set up in such a way as to make the entire younger generation firm in their biblical knowledge; one learned not only important sayings by heart but also attained an adequate knowledge of the rest. There were many people who stood fully prepared to supply biblical maxims for everything that transpired and to make use of sacred scripture in their conversations. It can't be denied that the wittiest and most graceful rejoinders emerged as when, even in our day, certain eternally applicable passages crop up here and there in conversation.

Classical dicta serve a similar purpose and through them we mark and express ever recurrent feelings and experiences.

Fifty years ago, when we were young, we too, wishing to show honour to our native poets, quickened our memories through their writings and showered them with the finest applause in expressing our own thoughts through their well-chosen and cultivated words and in that way we acknowledged that they knew how to unfurl our innermost feelings better than we ourselves did.

Still, to achieve our true purpose, we call to mind a well-known, yet quite mysterious, way of communicating in ciphers. To wit, when two people agree on a certain book and append page and line numbers to a letter, they can be certain that the recipient will work out the meaning with little difficulty.

The song, which we designate under the rubric 'Cipher', alludes to just such an agreement. Lovers will take certain poems by Hafiz as instruments for the exchange of their feelings. They indicate the page and the line which express their circumstances of the moment and in this way, collaboratively composed poems come about, most beautifully expressed. Splendidly scattered passages from this inestimable poet are joined together through passion and feeling, inclination and choice bestow an inner life on the whole of it, and the separated lovers, adorning their grief with the pearls of his words, find some solace in the outcome.

*

My heart demands me
To open myself to you;
Were I to hear from yours,
It would demand that of me.
Why does the world
Look upon me with such sadness?

In my innermost self
My friend alone dwells,
There is no one else there
And not a trace of the foe.
Within me grew a resolve
Sure as the rising sun.

From today onwards
I will lead my life
Only in transactions
Of his love.
I think of him,
My heart begins to bleed.

I have no strength
Other than in loving him,
So in stillness justified.
How can this be!
I want to hug him
And I cannot.⁸⁸

PROSPECTIVE DIVAN

At a certain period in Germany many imprints were distributed as manuscripts for friends. Whoever may find this off-putting should keep in mind that in the end every book is written only for an author's sympathisers, friends and admirers. I'd like to designate my own *Divan* in particular, the present edition of which can only be considered as incomplete. When I was younger, I would have had to hold it back longer; now, however, I find it more advantageous to assemble it myself than to bequeath such an undertaking to posterity, as Hafiz did. For the very fact that this little book stands there so, as I am now able to send it forth, arouses my desire to accord it, bit by bit, the full completion that it deserves. I now intend to indicate, book by book, and in proper order, what might still be hoped for from it.

*The Book of the Singer.*⁸⁹ In this part, as it now stands, vivid impressions of numerous objects and manifestations upon the senses and the spirit are expressed enthusiastically, and the close connections of the poet to the Orient are indicated. Were he to keep to this course, the happy garden might be embellished most charmingly; nevertheless, the design will expand with supreme felicity if the poet doesn't deal solely with himself and out of himself but rather expresses his gratitude in honour of patrons and friends, so as to clasp the living close with friendly words and to summon back those who have departed with fitting reverence.

Here though it should be kept in mind that the Oriental soar and glide, that rich and excessively laudatory sort of poetry, may not suit Westerners' sentiments. We comport ourselves with lofty freedom without taking refuge in hyperbole; and really, only a pure, finely felt poetry can articulate the genuine virtues of outstanding men, those whose perfections can be perceived only when they have passed beyond, when their individual foibles no longer annoy us and the consequences of their activities still stand, daily and hourly, before our eyes. The poet paid off a part of this debt not long ago, at a festive celebration in the presence of the Most Exalted [Empress], by offering wishes for happiness in his own convivial fashion.⁹⁰

*The Book of Hafiz.*⁹¹ If all those who use Arabic and related languages were born and raised as poets, one might imagine that exceptional spirits beyond number would emerge within such a nation. But if such a people recognises merely seven poets of the first rank in five hundred years, then we need to accept such an observation with deep respect, for it alone makes it possible for us to enquire on what such excellence really is based.

Inasmuch as it's possible to discharge, this task may very well be reserved too for the future *Divan*. For, to speak only of Hafiz, admiration of him and partiality for him increase the more one gets to know him. The most felicitous naturalness, high culture, effortless facility and the pure conviction that one gives people pleasure only when one sings to them what they would most enjoy hearing in comfort and ease while at the same time occasionally slipping to them things which are heavy, hard and unpalatable. If those in the know glimpse an image of Hafiz in the following poem, this attempt will gladden the Western poet exceedingly.

*

TO HAFIZ⁹²

You already know what everyone wants and have understood it well: for longing⁹³ holds us all, from the dust-speck to the throne, in mighty bonds.

It hurts so and yet afterwards it is good, who can struggle against it? If one breaks his neck, another remains emboldened.

Pardon, Master, as you know that often I presume when she tears her eyes away, that strolling cypress.⁹⁴
Like root-tendrils her foot creeps on and forms liaisons with the ground; like light cloud her greeting melts, like the east wind her breath.

That all urges us mysteriously where lock⁹⁵ upon lock is tousled, swells up curling in brown profusion, then murmurs in the wind.

Now the brow opens up in its clarity, to smooth out your heart, you hear a song so glad and true, to lay your mind down in it.

And when lips move in the most fetching way they set you free at once to lay yourself in shackles down.

The breath will return no more, soul fleeing to soul, scents coil themselves through the happiness, invisibly cloudily drawing.⁹⁶

But when all-consumingly it burns, then you reach for the cup; the cup-bearer⁹⁷ runs, the cup-bearer comes for a first and a second time.

His eye flashes, his heart trembles. He is hoping for instruction⁹⁸ from you, to hear you when wine exalts your mind to its sublimest sense.

For him the space of the worlds falls open. Salvation and order deep within, his breast swells, his down⁹⁹ darkens, he has become a young man.

And if you have no secret left that encompasses heart and world, you offer hints¹⁰⁰ both true and fond so that the meaning may unfold.

So, too, that the princely hoard from the throne may not be lost to us, give the Shah¹⁰¹ a goodly word, and give the vizier one too.

All this you know and you sing it today, and you'll sing it again tomorrow. So may your friendship companion us through life both rough and genial.

The Book of Love would swell considerably if six loving couples stepped forth in their various joys and sorrows; and still others might appear alongside them with greater or lesser clarity out of the murky past. Wamiq and 'Asra', for example, of whom no further notice exists beyond their names, might be introduced in the following manner:

Yes, love is a great gain!
Who could find a lovelier?
You don't grow mighty, you don't get rich;
Yet you become like the greatest hero.
Of Wamiq and of 'Asra' one might speak
As well as of the prophets.
One cannot speak but only name them:
Everyone must know their names.
But what they did, what they plied
Nobody knows! Just that they loved –
We do know that. Enough said!
When Wamiq and 'Asra' are asked about.¹⁰²

This book is no less prone to symbolic digression, which can scarcely be avoided in the Orient. The man of wit, dissatisfied with what is presented to him, regards everything offered to his senses as a disguise behind which a higher life of the spirit lies mischievously and stubbornly concealed for the purpose of drawing us on and luring us into more exalted regions. If a poet proceeds here with measure and deliberation, it can be legitimate to take pleasure in this and to test one's pinions on bolder flights.

*The Book of Reflections*¹⁰³ expands daily for him who dwells in the Orient; for there everything is reflection, wavering between the sensual and the suprasensual, without ever settling decisively on one or the other. The meditation which is urged upon one is of an idiosyncratic sort; it isn't dedicated solely to cleverness, even if this does make the strongest claims, but it is directed at the same time towards those points at which the strangest problems of earthly life stand starkly and pitilessly before us and oblige us to bend the knee before chance, before providence and its unsearchable decrees, and to express unqualified acceptance as the highest political, ethical and religious law.

Book of Ill-humour.¹⁰⁴ If the other books grow, the same privilege should be extended to this one. But cheerful, graceful, judicious ingredients have to be collected beforehand so the outbursts of ill-humour can be tolerable. Good will to men in general and benevolent and charitable feelings bind earth to heaven and make ready a paradise bestowed on humankind. By contrast, ill-humour is forever egotistical, it is made up of unappeasable demands; it is presumptuous, pushy and pleases no one, scarcely even those who are seized by the same feeling. Nevertheless, no human being can always restrain himself from such outbursts; indeed, he's doing well if he aims to puncture his displeasure in this way, especially over some activity that's been hindered or impaired. This particular book could have been much stronger and richer; however, we have set much aside in order to avoid bad feeling. Here we merely observe that those same utterances, which for the moment seem questionable but which in the long term will prove innocuous, will be gathered up with cheerfulness and benevolence and saved under the rubric *Paralipomena* for future years.

Here we take the opportunity to speak about overbearing arrogance and, first and foremost, how it manifests itself in the Orient. The ruler himself is first in arrogance, seeming to exclude all others. Everyone stands in his service; he is his own commander, no one commands him, and his own will constructs the rest of the world so that he can be compared with the sun, indeed, with the cosmos. Even so, it's striking that at the same time he is compelled to select a co-regent who stands at his side in this unbounded sphere and keeps him seated on the throne of all the worlds. This is the poet who works with him and alongside him and who exalts him far above other mortals. Should a number of like talents gather at his court, he gives them a king of the poets and in that way he acknowledges the highest talent as in his image. But the poet is encouraged, even led, by this to think as highly of himself as of his prince and to feel that he shares in ownership of the greatest excellence and felicity. He's fortified in this by the limitless gifts he receives, the wealth he accumulates and the effect he exercises. He becomes so firmly set in this way of thinking that any failure of his hopes drives him crazy. For his *Shah-nameh* Firdowsi expects sixty thousand pieces of gold, relying on an earlier statement of his emperor, but when he gets only sixty thousand pieces of silver instead, he splits the sum into three parts while sitting in his bath, gives one to the courier, another to the bath attendant and spends the third part on sherbets; then, with a few scurrilous lines of abuse, he at once cancels all the encomia which for so many years he had lavished on the Shah. He flees, goes into hiding, refuses to be recalled; instead, he passes his own hatred on to his relatives so that his sister scorns and refuses to accept a substantial gift sent by the placated Sultan but which arrived unfortunately only after Firdowsi's death.

If we wished to develop all this a bit further we'd say that from the throne down, and descending step by step to the dervish on the street corner, everyone is found to be crammed with arrogance, filled with worldly as well as spiritual pride which springs out vehemently and at once at the slightest provocation.

With respect to this ethical defect, if it can be considered such, the West looks quite wonderful. Modesty is really a social virtue; it betokens great refinement; it is self-denial directed outwardly but which, resting on a great inner sense of worth, is regarded as the highest of human qualities. Hence we hear that the rabble always praises modesty in the most eminent men, without dwelling particularly on other qualities. But modesty is always bound up with dissimulation and a kind of fawning which is all the more efficacious in that without the least impertinence it benefits the other by leaving him undisturbed in his comfortable self-regard. And yet, what is termed good society consists in an ever-increasing denial of oneself so that in the end, society itself becomes utterly null; it then has to cultivate talent in order that we may satisfy our own vanity by learning how to flatter the vanity of others.

Nevertheless, we'd like to reconcile our compatriots to the arrogant presumptions of our own Western poet.¹⁰⁵ A certain boastful ostentation¹⁰⁶ shouldn't be missing from the *Divan* if its Oriental character is to be expressed to some degree.

The poet couldn't lapse into disagreeable presumption against the upper classes. His fortunate position raised him above every struggle with despotism. The world agrees with the praise which he was able to bestow on his princely benefactors. The lofty persons with whom he stood once in relationship were praised and are still praised. In fact, one can reproach the poet that the share of encomia in his *Divan* is not sufficiently abundant.

But with respect to the *Book of Ill-Humour* one would really like to find things in it to reprove. Every vexed fellow expresses himself too blatantly – his personal expectations haven't been met, his merit hasn't been recognised! Yes, he too! He's not constrained from above but he suffers from below and from the side. An importunate, often shallow, often vicious rabble with its choirmasters cripples his activity; initially he girds himself with pride and disdain but then, too sharply stung and harried, he feels himself strong enough to hew his way through.

But just as we are about to intimate to him that he can soften many a presumption by having recourse in the final instance, with wit and feeling, to his Beloved, he humbles, nay, annihilates, himself before her. The reader's heart and mind will chalk this up to his credit.

*The Book of Wisdom*¹⁰⁷ should swell out before the others; it is quite closely related to the *Books of Reflections* and *Ill-Humour*. Oriental maxims, however, contain the distinctive character of their poetic art as a whole in that they very often bear upon sensuous and visible objects; and amongst these are many which one might rightly call laconic parables. This category is the most difficult for Westerners since our surroundings seem too dry, regulated and prosaic. Even so, old German proverbs, in which the sense is shaped into simile, could be our model here.

The Book of Timur.¹⁰⁸ This really should be set on a good foundation, and perhaps several years must pass, so that an exalted view of tremendous historical events no longer distorts our view. This tragedy might be lightened if one decided to let Nasreddin Hoja, the dread world-destroyer's jocular companion in both tent and battlefield, step forward from time to time.¹⁰⁹ Pleasant hours, free fancy, offer the best support. We here append a sampling of these little tales which have been transmitted to us.

*

Timur was an ugly fellow; he was blind in one eye and lame in one foot. One day when Hoja was with him, Timur scratched his head – it was time for a haircut – and commanded that the barber be summoned. After he'd shaved his head the barber put a mirror in Timur's hand, as usual. Timur looked at himself in the mirror and found his appearance exceedingly ugly. He started to weep over this, Hoja began to weep too, and the two of them went on weeping for a few hours. At this one of Timur's companions comforted him and entertained him with strange tales so that he might forget everything. Timur stopped crying but Hoja did not; in fact, he began crying even more strongly. At last Timur said to Hoja: 'Listen! I looked in the mirror and I saw how ugly I was. I was saddened by this because not only am I emperor but I also have great property and many slaves, and yet, I am so very ugly; that's why I cried. But why do you keep on crying without cease?' Hoja replied, 'If you looked in the mirror just once and at the sight of your own face you couldn't stand looking at yourself, what should we do who have to look at your face by day and by night? If we don't weep, who should? That's why I wept.' Timur was beside himself with laughter.

The Book of Suleika. This is the strongest part of the entire collection and might well be considered closed. The breath and spirit of a passion which wafts through all of it aren't easy to recover and yet, their return, like that of a fine vintage, can at least be awaited in hope and humility.

Even so, we may add some observations on the demeanour of our Western poet in this book. Following the example of many of his eastern precursors he remains aloof from the Sultan. As a frugal dervish he may even compare himself with the prince; for the thoroughgoing beggar is a kind of king. Poverty prompts audacity. Not to acknowledge the value of worldly goods, to ask for none of them, or at least very little, is his resolve, and this produces an utterly carefree sense of contentment. Instead of chasing after anxiety-provoking possessions, he bestows lands and treasures in his thoughts and mocks anyone who once really owned and then lost such things. Our poet has truly pledged himself to voluntary poverty in order to step forth all the more proudly for there is a maiden involved and for her sake that poverty is sacred and ever-present before him.

And yet, he boasts of a still greater lack: youth has left him. He decks his old age, his grey hair, with Suleika's love, not in some foppish and impertinent fashion¹¹⁰ – no! but in the certainty that she returns his love. She, so rich in brilliance, can value brilliance of mind, which brings youth to early fruition and rejuvenates old age.

The Book of the Cup-Bearer.¹¹¹ Neither the immoderate inclination to wine, half forbidden as it is, nor tender feelings for the beauty of a growing boy should be scanted in the *Divan*; however, the latter will be treated quite chastely in conformity with our customs.

The reciprocal attraction of youth and old age actually points to an authentically pedagogical relationship. A child's passionate inclination for an old man is not at all a rare phenomenon but it is a rarely exploited one. We permit the relationship of the grandson with the grandfather, or that of the late-born heir with the tenderly astonished father. The intelligence of children really develops in such relationships; they become aware of the dignity, experience and power of the older person; here pure-born souls feel the need of a reverential inclination; old age is stirred and held fast. If youth feels and employs its superiority to attain childish goals and satisfy childish needs, we are reconciled by its graceful charm combined with precocious mischievousness. Nevertheless, there is something profoundly moving about a boy's sense of ever striving onward when he is stirred by the lofty spirit of old age and, in amazement at himself, has the presentiment that he too is capable of fostering something comparable within himself. We sought to indicate such lovely relations in the *Book of the Cup-Bearer* and to set out contemporary instances as well. Sa'di has, however, preserved some examples for us, the delicate tenderness of which – universally acknowledged as they are – offers us the most thorough understanding.

Thus he relates the following in his *Rose Garden*.¹¹² 'When Mahmud, the king of Khwarezm, made peace with the king of Chatta [Cathay], I went into the church¹¹³ at Kashgar (a city of the Uzbeks or Tartars) where, as you know, school is held; and there I saw a boy utterly lovely in form and face. He held a grammar book in his hand in order to learn to speak well and correctly. He read out loud as one example of a rule: *daraba Zaydun 'Amran* ('Zayd beat 'Amr').¹¹⁴ '*Amran*' is in the accusative. (These names serve here as general appellations of adversaries, just as Germans say 'Hinz' or 'Kunz'.) When he had repeated these words a few times, so as to imprint them on his memory, I said to him, 'Khwarezm and Chatta have at last made peace, so should Zayd and 'Amr keep on fighting one another?' The boy laughed charmingly and asked what country I came from. When I replied that I came from Shiraz, he asked whether I knew any of Sa'di's writings by heart, for he was very fond of the Persian language.

I replied: 'Just as you have given yourself heart and mind to the study of grammar, out of your love for pure language, so too has my heart given itself wholly to you in love, such that the image of your nature has stolen the image of my reason.' He looked at me attentively as though he wanted to determine whether the words I'd spoken were the poet's or expressed my own feelings. But I went on, 'You have caught the lover's heart in a net, as did Zayd. We would go about happily with you but you are hostile and ill disposed against us, like Zayd against 'Amr.' But he replied to me with embarrassed diffidence in verses from my own poems and I had the benefit of being able to recite the most beautiful of them all to him; and so we passed several days together in such graceful exchanges. But when the court got ready to depart once more and we prepared to take our leave early in the morning, one of our travelling companions said to him, 'That is Sa'di himself after whom you were asking.'

The boy came running swiftly, placed himself before me in a friendly but reverent manner, and expressed the wish to have known who I was earlier. He said, 'Why didn't you disclose yourself to me that day and say, "I'm Sa'di" so that I might offer you fitting tribute to the best of my ability and lay my humble service at your feet?' I answered, 'When I looked upon you, I could not utter the words "I am he", my heart broke open towards you like a rose which is beginning to bloom.' He went on to ask whether it might not be possible for me to stay a few more days so that he could learn something of art and scholarship from me, but I replied, 'It cannot be; for here I see eminent people sitting between great mountains but I'd be happy to have a cave somewhere in the world and remain inside it.'¹¹⁵ At this he seemed to be a bit sad and so I asked why he didn't betake himself to the city where he could free his heart from the bondage of melancholy and live more cheerfully. He replied that there were indeed many lovely and charming sights in the city but that it was also so muddy and slippery that even elephants could slip and fall. 'And I too [he said] wouldn't remain on a firm footing if faced with such wicked examples.' When we'd spoken we kissed one another on face and forehead and took our leave. And what the poet wrote was true: 'Lovers at parting are like beautiful apples: a cheek which presses against another cheek reddens with liveliness and pleasure and yet, the cheek on the other side is pale with a wasting sorrow.'

In another passage the same poet recounts:¹¹⁶

'In my youth I formed a firm and lasting friendship with a youth like myself. In my eyes his brow was like the heavens to which we turn when we pray as to a magnet. His companionship was the best gain of all my wheeling and dealing. I hold that no human being on earth could be compared with him in demeanour, uprightness and honour, though amongst the angels there might be one. After I had enjoyed such friendship I lost it and after his death it seemed wrong for me to confer my love on another. For his foot was caught unawares in the snare of his fate so that he had to hasten to his grave. I sat and I lay at his grave like a watchman for a good spell and uttered laments over his death and our separation which I myself as well as others still find moving.'

The Book of Parables.¹¹⁷ Even though Western nations have made much of the riches of the Orient their own, still there remains much to be gleaned here, and we present what follows as a way of indicating that.

Parables, like other Oriental poetic modes which relate to manners, can be divided rather handily into three different categories: ethical, moral and ascetic. The first category includes episodes and intimations which refer to people and their circumstances generally without expressing a view as to what is good and what bad. Nevertheless, that is presupposed in excellent fashion by the second category in which the auditor is presented with a rational choice. The third category, by contrast, affixes a decisive constraint: the ethical prompting becomes commandment and law. These give rise to a fourth category which represents the marvellous directions and dispensations which emerge out of the unsearchable and inscrutable decrees of God; which teaches and confirms the genuine Islam, that unconditional submission to God's will, and the conviction that no one can evade his fate once it has been determined. Perhaps one might even add a fifth category which we would have to call 'the mystical'. It impels people from their former circumstances, which remain continually anxious and oppressive, towards union with God in this life and a provisional renunciation of those very goods whose possible loss can cause us pain. If one can sort out the various purposes behind all the pictorial representations of the Orient, much has been gained, since otherwise one always feels obstructed when they are jumbled together, now seeking out some useful purpose where none exists, but all the while overlooking some deeper significance. To offer striking examples of the range of types must make *The Book of Parables* both interesting and instructive. To what end the elements which we've offered here may be directed we leave to the astute reader's discretion.

The Book of the Parsi.¹¹⁸ Multiple distractions alone have prevented the poet from representing the worship of sun and fire – seemingly so abstract and yet so gripping in practice – in verse to its full extent, for which the most marvellous materials are at hand. May he be granted the happy opportunity at some point to fill this gap!

The Book of Paradise.¹¹⁹ This area of Muslim belief too has so many astonishingly lovely locales – paradises within paradises – that one would love to enter, where one would love to dwell. Solemnity and light-heartedness intertwine so delightfully here and the common light of day, now transfigured, gives us wings to rise ever higher and reach the farthest heights. What could stop the poet from mounting Muhammad's miraculous horse and soaring through all the heavens? Why shouldn't he reverently celebrate that hallowed night in which the Qur'an was conveyed in its entirety to the Prophet from on high? Here too much is yet to be gained.

OLD TESTAMENT MATTERS

Now that I've cajoled myself with the sweet hope that with respect to both the *Divan* itself and its accompanying notes I may yet achieve a great deal of effect, I skim through my preparatory work which lies before me, unused and unrealised, in innumerable pages. There I come upon an essay, written some twenty-five years earlier, which refers to papers and studies which are themselves much older.

My friends will recall from my biographical ventures¹²⁰ that I devoted much time and attention to the First Book of Moses¹²¹ and spent many a day of my youth strolling amongst the paradises of the East. To the historical books which followed my inclination and my zeal were also applied. The four last Books of Moses demanded diligent efforts and the essay that follows contains the peculiar results. May that essay be accorded a place at this point. For since all our peregrinations through the Orient were occasioned by the Holy Scriptures, we come back to them over and over as to springs of water, supremely vivifying even if occasionally muddled, coursing in concealment in the earth only to gush forth, pure and fresh, yet again.

'Then a new king ascended the throne of Egypt, who knew nothing of Joseph.'¹²³ For the ruler as for his people the name of his benefactor had vanished; even for the Israelites themselves the names of their forefathers seem to have sounded like ancient chimes from afar. In four hundred years the little family had multiplied beyond belief. The promise made by God to its great patriarch amid so many uncertainties had been fulfilled. And yet, what sort of succour did it offer? Their very numbers rendered them suspect to the principal inhabitants of the land. Attempts were made to torment, terrorise, harass and exterminate them and even as their stiff-necked nature armed them against this, they could clearly foresee their utter destruction as they, once-free keepers of flocks, were forced to build strong cities with their own hands in and around the borders of Egypt, places which were openly intended to serve as sites of oppression and imprisonment for them.

But here we pause before going any farther and toiling through strange, wretchedly edited books to ask what residue would be left behind as a basis, as primordial matter, of the four last Books of Moses, given that we find it necessary to recall so much as well as to keep so much at a remove?

The original, the unique, the deepest theme of world history and the history of humankind, to which all else must be subordinate, is still the conflict between unbelief and belief. All epochs in which faith reigns supreme, in whatever form it takes, are brilliant, uplifting and fruitful for their own times and for posterity. But all epochs in which unbelief asserts its sorry triumph, in whatever form, even if it may strut and glitter with a spurious lustre, sink without a trace for posterity simply because no one likes wasting his time learning about what is unfruitful.

If the first Book of Moses portrays the triumph of belief, the last four – Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy – take unbelief as their theme. True, this unbelief doesn't contest and combat belief (which certainly doesn't stand revealed in its entire fullness) in the pettiest ways but rather shoves obstacles in its path, step by step. Such unbelief is neither cured nor uprooted, either by occasional good deeds or, more often, by ghastly penalties; it is only temporarily stilled and because of that, it ever continues its slithering advance until it threatens to wreck, at its very inception, a sublime and noble enterprise undertaken on the most magnanimous promises of a trustworthy national God and which can never be fully and finally consummated. If, at least at first glance, the jumbled contents are distasteful to us, making the motifs threading the whole so tedious and grim, the books themselves have become even more unendurable because of the markedly dour and incomprehensible way in which they have been put together. Everywhere we see the sweep of history blocked by countless interpolated laws the true cause and intention of which can for the most part scarcely be grasped; or in any case, not why they were given at a certain moment or, if of later provenance, why they've been introduced and inserted in this passage. It's hard to discern why during some huge military campaign, already exposed to so many obstacles, the protagonists are quite intentionally and trivially preoccupied with multiplying all the religious ceremonial baggage by which every forward movement is fatally weighed down. It's hard to grasp why laws are promulgated for a vague and unknowable future while every day and every hour good counsel and right action are missing, and the commander, obliged to stand on his own two feet, hurls himself again and again face downward to beseech favours and punishments from on high, both of which are merely frittered away so that the principal aim for a baffled people is completely lost to sight.

To find my way in this labyrinth I set myself the task of meticulously sorting out what is really narrative, whether this pertains to history, fable – or both at the same time – or to poetry. I separated all this from whatever was taught and commanded. In the first category I understood all that pertains to all countries and all ethical people; in the second, I placed whatever specifically addresses and unites the Israelites. I myself hardly dare to judge to what extent I've succeeded in this since at the moment I'm no longer in a position to carry those studies forward; instead, I'm compiling whatever I can display out of papers old and new, as time permits. There are two things to which I'd like to direct my readers' attention. First, to the development of the entire story of this miraculous journey out of the very character of its leader who initially doesn't appear in the most favourable light; and second, to the suspicion that the journey lasted not forty years but scarcely two; during which the leader whose comportment we were at first obliged to fault, is once again justified and restored to honour. But at the same time, the honour of the national God is rescued from the slur of hard-heartedness which is even less agreeable than His people's obstinacy, and He is just about reinstated in His former purity.

Let's first of all remember the people of Israel in Egypt whose oppressed condition posterity is summoned to share. Amongst this race of the mighty tribe of Levi a powerful man stepped forth; a lively sense of justice and injustice characterised him. He appeared worthy of his fierce ancestors, of whom the patriarch [Jacob] proclaimed, 'The brothers Simeon and Levi! Their swords are murderous weapons. My soul will not enter their council and my honour will not be in their assembly! For in their wrath they strangled the man and in their wickedness they ruined the oxen. Cursed be their fury that is so vehement, and their wrath that is so obstinate! I will scatter them in Jacob and strew them in Israel.'¹²⁴

This is wholly the spirit in which Moses manifests himself. He secretly slays the Egyptian who has mistreated an Israelite. His patriotic assassination is discovered and he has to flee. One doesn't need to look for causes in the upbringing of someone who commits such a deed and presents himself as a mere child of nature. He received the favour of a princess as a young boy, he was reared at court; nothing acted upon him; he grew into a fine, strong man but one who remained rough and unpolished under all circumstances. And we too find him to be just such a powerful, volatile, withdrawn man, incapable of expressing himself, in his exile as well. His bold fist earns him the affection of a royal priest of Midian who at once brings him into his family.¹²⁵ Now he gets to know the desert where one day in the future he will emerge in the trying role of a commander of armies.

Before anything else let us cast a glance at the Midianites amongst whom Moses now finds himself. We need to acknowledge them as a great people, which like all nomadic and trading peoples, appears even greater than it actually is thanks to its many activities and its lively dispersion. We find Midianites on Mount Horeb, on the western side of the little gulf and from there toward Moab and the Arnon.¹²⁶ At times we find them as merchants travelling in caravans through Canaan toward Egypt.

Moses lived among such cultured people from now on but as a shepherd, withdrawn and set apart. We see him in the most grievous circumstances in which an exceptional man can find himself – a man born not for contemplation and reflection but for action – now isolated in the wilderness but constantly preoccupied by the destiny of his people, constantly turned toward the god of his forefathers, and painfully aware of his banishment from a land which, while it isn't the land of his ancestors, is at present his people's homeland. Too weak to have any effect through his own physical force in this great matter, quite incapable of drawing up a plan, and even if he were capable of doing so, quite maladroit at undertaking a coherent oral discourse in which personality shows to advantage. It's hardly surprising that so forceful a character would eat himself alive in such circumstances.

In this situation the links which are maintained with his own people through the caravans passing to and fro can afford him some consolation. After much doubt and hesitation he decides to return and become the saviour of his people. His brother Aaron comes to him and he learns for the first time that the ferment amongst the populace has swelled precipitously. Now both brothers venture to present themselves to the king as representatives. But the latter is clearly not at all inclined to relinquish this multitude of people so easily – settled for centuries in his land, initially keepers of flocks but then schooled in agriculture, arts and crafts, they had intermixed with his vassals and at the very least, their uncouth masses could be employed in levies for the erection of colossal monuments and the construction of new cities and fortresses – he isn't inclined to allow them to return to their old autonomy.

And so their request was turned down and during the outbreak of the plagues, ever more urgently repeated and ever more stubbornly refused. But the Hebrews, now mobilised, with a promised land in sight which an ancient tradition had promised them and with hopes for independence and selfgovernment, acknowledged no further duties. Under the guise of a general celebration, they wheedled gold and silver settings from their neighbours and just when the Egyptians supposed that the Israelites were engaged in harmless banqueting, a Sicilian Vespers in reverse was set in motion.¹²⁷ This time the stranger murdered the inhabitant, the guest the host, and guided by a cruel policy, they slew only the firstborn; this, in a country where the firstborn enjoys so many rights, for the purpose of distracting the later-born so as to be able to elude immediate revenge through precipitous flight.¹²⁸ The stratagem succeeded; the murderers were not punished but expelled. Only later did the king muster his army; but these horsemen and chariots, ordinarily so terrifying to people on foot, fight an unequal battle on swampy ground with the lightly armed, and skimpy, rear-guard; indeed, very possibly with the same bold and determined swarms who had already had practice by carrying out that bold stroke of murder at large, and whom we won't fail to designate, and recognise once more, by the consequences of their horrid acts.

Such a fighting force and a people on the march, well equipped for both attack and defence, could choose more than one path into the Promised Land. The first choice, at the sea, via Gaza, was not a caravan route and could prove dangerous because of its well-armed and warlike inhabitants. The second one, though more distant, appeared to offer more safety as well as great advantages. It led on the Red Sea to Sinai, from whence there were two directions which could be taken. The first of these, which ran directly to the goal, went along a small bay through the land of the Midians and Moabites to the Jordan; the second one,

straight through the wilderness, led to Kadesh; on the former route the land of Edom lay to the left but on this one to the right. Moses probably preferred the former way but he seems to have been directed to the second way by the clever Midianites, as we might think to do at the outset, when we spoke earlier of the sombre mood in which the portrayal of the outer circumstances accompanying this exodus puts us.

The bright night sky gleaming with countless stars, which Abraham was shown by his God, no longer extends its golden tent above us. Instead of resembling those shining lights of heaven, an innumerable populace sets out sullenly into a bleak wilderness. All gladsome phenomena have vanished; only tongues of fire appear at every corner, every turn. The Lord who called Moses out of a burning bush now moves on ahead of the mass of people in a dreary smoke-blaze which by day can be addressed as a pillar of cloud, by night as a fiery comet. From Mount Sinai's cloud-capped summit lightning and thunder break terrifyingly and at any infraction, however minor, flames burst from the earth and consume the outskirts of the encampment. Food and drink are ever scarcer and the people's vexed longing to turn back only gets more anxious the less their leader can help in any fundamental way.

Early on, even before the column reaches the Sinai, Jethro comes to meet his son-in-law, brings him daughters and grandchildren, kept safe in the patriarchal tent against a time of need, and shows himself to be a shrewd fellow. Such a people as the Midianites, who follow their own course freely and know how to find occasions to put their strengths to use, have to be better formed than a people that lives under a foreign yoke and is constantly at loggerheads both with itself and its conditions. And how capable of far loftier views must the leader of that folk be than a morose, self-contained, upright man, who feels himself born to action and command but to whom nature has denied the tools for such hazardous handiwork.

Moses couldn't rise to the notion that a leader is not ubiquitous nor that he doesn't have to do everything himself. On the contrary, he made the administration of his duties quite distasteful and burdensome to himself through his own personal involvement. Jethro is the first who opens his eyes to this; he helps him organise the people and direct his subordinates – something at which he himself would have certainly failed.¹²⁹

Jethro may not have been considering only what was best for his son-in-law and the Israelites but may have had his own benefit and that of the Midianites in mind as well. Moses now comes to him – Moses whom he took in earlier as a fugitive and until recently counted among his servants and retainers – at the head of a huge throng which has left its former habitation to seek a new territory and which spreads terror and dread wherever it goes.

It can't elude this perceptive man that the quickest route for the children of Israel goes through the holdings of the Midianites, that this march will encounter his people's flocks at every turn, will infringe its settlements and indeed, come smack up against its well-appointed cities. The principles governing such a nomadic people aren't mysterious: they are founded on the right of conquest. It doesn't proceed without resistance and in all resistance it sees injustice; whoever defends what is his is an enemy who can be destroyed without mercy.

To envision the fate to which a populace would be exposed were such a locust swarm to roll across it didn't take any unusual foresight. And here the suspicion first begins to dawn that Jethro counselled against the best and quickest way and persuaded him to take the way straight through the wilderness. This suspicion is strengthened since Hobab never stirs from his brother-in-law's side until he sees him well down the recommended path; in fact, he even accompanies him farther in order to keep the line of march safely away from the dwellings of the Midianites.

The departure of which we're speaking occurred just fourteen months after the exodus from Egypt. Along the way the people designated a spot where they had undergone great trials because of their wantonness by the name 'Craving-Graves'.¹³⁰ Then they proceeded toward Hazaroth and camped further along in the wilderness of Paran. The course they took remains beyond doubt. They were now approaching the goal of their journey; only the mountain stood in their way which separated the land of Canaan from the wilderness. They decided to send scouts out and in the meantime moved closer to Kadesh. And here the envoys returned, bringing tidings of the land's great excellence but unfortunately of the fearsome inhabitants as well. Now there arose, however, a grievous division and the strife between belief and unbelief began anew.

Unfortunately Moses had even less talent as a field commander than as a ruler. During the battles against the Amalekites, he betook himself up a mountain to pray while Joshua at the head of the army finally won the victory which had been long shifting back and forth between the two forces. Now, at Kadesh, another difficult situation arose. Joshua and Caleb, the pluckiest of the twelve emissaries, counselled attack, calling out, confident of winning the territory. But meanwhile fear and alarm are stirred up on all sides through exaggerated descriptions of the armed and gigantic inhabitants of the land; the army is cowed, refuses to budge. Moses yet again is unable to help; at first he musters them but then an attack from this side strikes him as hazardous. He proposes to move eastward. At this point it may appear ignoble to that upright element in the army to abandon such a serious and painstakingly elaborated plan towards this long hoped-for goal. They band together and actually climb the mountain. Moses remains behind; the Ark of the Covenant is not set in motion and so it isn't fitting for either Joshua or Caleb to lead these bolder spirits. Enough! The unsupported, high-handed vanguard is beaten down, restlessness spreads. The people's annoyance, which has led so often before to outbursts – the several mutinies in which even Aaron and Miriam took part – breaks out again even more violently and bears witness to how unfit Moses is for his mighty calling. Indeed, this is not even in question; it is irrefutably confirmed by the testimony of Caleb, that in this position it's not merely possible but indispensable to press into the land of Canaan, to take possession of Hebron and the terebinth-trees of Mamre,¹³¹ to capture the holy grave of Abraham and thereby create a goal as well as a centre-point and support for the entire endeavour. But, on the other hand, what harm must befall the wretched people if it is decided abruptly and recklessly to abandon the plan which Jethro – not wholly disinterestedly but not entirely treacherously – had suggested and which had been followed up to now?

The second year, calculated from the exodus out of Egypt to the present, wasn't yet over and before the end of it – late enough in any case – the possession of the fairest portion of the promised land had been envisioned; only the inhabitants, on the alert, had slammed the door shut and so, where now to turn? Having advanced far enough to the north, it was necessary to travel to the east to strike the path at last which should have been taken in the first place. But right here, in the east, lay the land of Edom encircled by mountains; a right of passage was requested which the cunning Edomites countered by suggesting they go around. To fight their way through wasn't advisable; and so they had to be satisfied with a detour, with the mountains of Edom to their left, and here the journey proceeded for the most part without difficulty; there were but a few stops – Oboth, Iyim – before reaching Sared brook, the waters of which flow into the Dead Sea, and then the Arnon.¹³² In the meantime, Miriam and Aaron had died too not long after they had risen up against Moses.

From the Arnon brook onward all went even better than before. The people saw that they were for the second time close to the goal of all their desires and in a region which offered few obstacles; here it was possible to surge forward en masse and overwhelm, despoil and expel the people who had forbidden them free passage. They advanced and the Midianites, the Moabites, and the Amorites were assailed in the finest of their habitations; indeed, the first of these (the Midianites) were exterminated – what Jethro had plotted to avert – the left bank of the Jordan was taken, a few restless tribes allowed to settle there; in the meantime, however, while laws were promulgated and regulations drawn up, in the usual fashion, there was a hesitation to cross the Jordan. Amid these deliberations Moses himself died, as Aaron had died; and unless we're very much mistaken, Joshua and Caleb thought it good to bring the leadership of a limited man, over several years, to an end and to despatch him along the path of those many unfortunates whom he had despatched earlier; to bring the matter to a conclusion and to set about seriously taking possession of the entire right bank of the Jordan and the land alongside.¹³³

It will easily be granted that the account as here presented brings the progress of a momentous undertaking quickly and consistently into the mind's eye; and yet, credibility as well as approval won't be so immediately granted because my account has that military expedition, which the explicit letter of Holy Scripture stretches out over many years, brought to a conclusion in short order. So we have to give the reasons which we believe justify such a wide divergence; and this cannot come about in any better fashion than by directing our observations both to that stretch of land which that mass of people had to traverse, and to the amount of time which any caravan requires for such a passage, and simultaneously to compare and assess what has been handed down to us by tradition in this particular instance.

We pass over the march from the Red Sea up to Sinai; we leave all that occurred in the area of the mountain as it stands. We note merely that the bulk of the populace set out from the base of Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month in the second year of the exodus from Egypt. From there to the wilderness of Paran they had barely forty miles to cover, a distance which a laden caravan can cover handily in five days. Permitting the entire file time to catch up now and then, along with adequate days to rest, and even allowing for further stops, they could reach the area of their destination in twelve days, which then also agrees with the Bible and with conventional opinion. Here the envoys are despatched, the entire people move only a little bit onward up to Kadesh, whereupon the envoys return after forty days and right at this point, after a move towards war goes wrong, they undertake negotiation with the Edomites. Allow as much time for this negotiation as you will, it really can't be stretched beyond thirty days. The Edomites reject the free passage and it isn't advisable for Israel to linger long in so hazardous a position. If the Canaanites had agreed with the Edomites – one from the North, the other from the East – to pour forth out of their mountains, the Israelites would have faced a grim situation.

The historical narrative doesn't pause even here but the decision is made at once to go around the mountain of Edom. Now the circuit around the mountain of Edom, first going south, then heading north, up to the brook Arnon is scarcely forty miles, which can be covered in five days. If we also add those forty days in

which the mourning for Aaron occurred, we still come to six months out of the second year [to account] for every sort of delay and hesitation, over and above those marches which would bring the children of Israel successfully to the Jordan. Where then do the remaining thirty-eight years fit in?

These have given the exegetes a lot of trouble, as have the forty-one stops, among which are fifteen which the account tells us nothing about but which, interpolated into the list, have caused geographers much grief. The stopping places which have been inserted stand in a relationship, at once felicitous and fabulous, with the superfluous years. Thus, sixteen places, of which we know nothing, and thirty-eight years, about which we also know nothing, give us the best opportunity to wander together with the children of Israel in the wilderness.

We juxtapose the stopping places of the historical account which became noteworthy because of events with the stopping places on the list whose empty names can then quite easily be distinguished from those which possess historical content.

Historical Accounts in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy List of Stopping-Places according to Numbers 33

	Ramses
	Succoth
	Etham
Hahiroth	Hahiroth
	Migdol
	<i>Through the sea.</i>
Marah, Wilderness of Sur Elim	Marah, Wilderness of Etham Elim. Twelve wells
	At the (Red) Sea
Wilderness of Sin	Wilderness of Sin
	Dophkah
	Alush
Rephidim	Rephidim
Sinai Desert	Sinai Desert
Graves of Greed	Graves of Greed
Hazereth	Hazereth
	Rithmah
Kadesh in Paran	Rimmon-parez
	Libnah
	Rissah
	Khelathah
	Mt. Shapher
	Haradah
	Makeloth
	Tahath
	Tarah
	Mithcah
	Hashmonah
	Moseroth
	Bene-jaakan
	Hor-haggidgad
	Jotbathah (Talhbatha)
	Ebronah
	Ezion-geber
Kadesh, Wilderness of Zin	Kadesh, Wilderness of Zin
Mt. Hor, borders of Edom	Mt. Hor, borders of Edom
	Zalmonah
	Punon
Oboth	Oboth
	Iyim
	Dibon-gad
	Almon-diblathaim
Mt. Abarim	Mt. Abarim, Nebo
Brook Zared	
This side of the Arnon	
Mathana	
Nahaliel	
Bamoth	
Mt. Pispa	
Jahzah	
Hesbon	
Sihan	
Basan	
Moabite territory at the Jordan	Moabite territory at the Jordan

What we must point out above all else at this point, however, is that the narrative takes us straight from Hazereth to Kadesh while the list, by contrast, omits Kadesh beyond Hazereth and only introduces it into the interpolated sequence of names after Ezion-geber and in this way brings the wilderness of Zin into contact with the small arm of the Arabian gulf of the ocean.¹³⁵ The exegetes have gone seriously astray on this point; certain of them assume that there are two Kadeshes while others – indeed, the majority of them – accept only one; this latter opinion is not in doubt.

The historical narrative, when we've separated it painstakingly from all the inserted bits, speaks of a Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran and immediately thereafter of a Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin; the envoys are sent away from the first of these, while the whole mass of the people is sent away from the second after the Edomites have forbidden them passage through their land. From this it's clear that this is one and the same place; for the proposed march through Edom was a result of the misfired attempt to enter into the land of Canaan from this side. As is clear from other passages, the two wildernesses that are mentioned about one another: Zin lies more northerly, Paran more to the south, while Kadesh is set as a resting-place in an oasis between the two wildernesses.

The thought would never have occurred to anyone to imagine that there were two Kadeshes were it not for the predicament arising from leading the Israelites around for so long in the wilderness. Nevertheless, those who accept only a single Kadesh and then want to account for a forty-year journey and the interpolated stopping-places are even worse; if they chart the journey on maps, they cannot contain their astonishment sufficiently in attempting to make what is impossible plain to see. For the eye is of course a finer judge of what's unsuitable than is the inner sense. Sanson shoves the fourteen inauthentic stopping-places between Sinai and Kadesh.¹³⁶ Here he can scarcely draw enough zig-zags on his map and yet, each stopping-place accounts for only two miles, a distance wholly insufficient to allow such a huge column of troops to heave itself into motion.

How populated and built up this wilderness must have been if at every two miles resting-places with designated names, if not cities and towns, were to be found! What an advantage for the commander of an army and his people! Still, this profusion in the heart of the wilderness soon botches matters for the geographer. From Kadesh to Ezion-geber he finds only five stations while on the way back to Kadesh, where he has to bring them, he unfortunately finds none what- soever. He puts a few strange cities, not even named in the list, in the path of these journeying folk, in the same way as once upon a time elephants were

used to cover empty places on the map. Calmet, out of a need to help himself out of odd crossroads and backtrackings, places one part of the superfluous places up against the inland sea, makes Hazeroth and Moseroth into a single place and finally brings his people by the weirdest sideways leaps to the Arnon.¹³⁷ Well, who accepts two Kadeshes distorts the lie of the land beyond measure.¹³⁸ For Nolin, the caravan dances a polonaise by which it ends up again at the Red Sea with Sinai behind it to the north.¹³⁹ It isn't possible to manifest less imagination, observation, precision and judgement than these pious, well-meaning men.

But regarded in the most exact manner, it seems highly probable that the superfluous list of stopping places was inserted to salvage the problematic forty years. For it stands written in the text, which we've followed precisely in our account, that the people, having been defeated by the Canaanites and forbidden to pass through the land of Edom, proceeded on the way to the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) towards Ezion-geber, going around the land of Edom. This is how the error came about, that they actually came to the Red Sea after Ezion-geber, which then probably didn't yet exist, even though the text speaks of the going-around of Mount Seir along a named path, just as one says that the carter travels on Leipzig Street without his having necessarily to travel to Leipzig because of this. If we've now set the superfluous places aside, we can also manage to deal with the superfluous years. We know that Old Testament chronology is artificial, that the entire reckoning of time can be broken down into discrete cycles of forty-nine years; furthermore, to produce these mystical epochs, many historical numbers have to be altered. Where to insert the six to thirty-eight years missing from a cycle more agreeably than into that very epoch which lay in such obscurity and which transpired in a chaotic and unknown patch?

Without touching at all on chronology, the hardest of all disciplines, we wish to bring its poetic aspect into consideration in support of our hypothesis.

Many numbers which can be termed round, sacred, symbolic and poetic occur in the Bible as in other ancient scriptures. The number seven seems to be dedicated to making, acting and doing, the number forty, by contrast, to contemplation and waiting, but even more especially to separation. The Flood which separates Noah and his family from the rest of the world takes forty days; after the waters have risen sufficiently they course for forty days and for the same length of time Noah keeps the door of the ark shut fast. Moses spends the same time twice on Sinai, apart from his people; the envoys remain just that long in Canaan, and so too must all the people be confirmed and consecrated by being cut off from all other peoples for so many wearisome years of the same span of time. And the significance of this number in its full value crosses over into the New Testament: Christ remains in the wilderness for forty days to wait out the tempter.¹⁴⁰

Had we succeeded in bringing the Children of Israel from the Sinai up to the Jordan in a shorter span of time (even if we've taken too much account of improbable and wavering delays), had we rid ourselves of so many futile years and sterile stopping-places, then the great general would have been restored with all his valour intact, in contrast to what we've had to recall concerning him. The way in which God appears in these books, where He shows Himself to be both horrid and terrifying, would not have been so oppressive as well; since yet again in the Books of Joshua and Judges, and even beyond those, a purer patriarchal being emerges once more: the God of Abraham appears ever friendly to His own, even if for a long time the God of Moses filled us with revulsion and dread. We spell it out to make it clear to ourselves: as is the man, so too is his God. And so, in this connection, a few final words about the character of Moses!

Someone might exclaim to us, 'You have already, with quite excessive audacity, denied to an extraordinary man those very qualities – the qualities of a ruler and general – which made him admired in the past. What then marks him out? In what way does he justify so momentous a calling for himself? What gives him the boldness, despite unfavourable circumstances within and without, to press forward in such dealings, if he lacks the principal requirements, the indispensable talents, which you with such unparalleled impertinence deny him?' At this point allow us to reply. It isn't talent, it isn't skill in this or that, which makes a *man of action*; in such cases everything depends upon personality. Character has its basis in personality, not in talents. Talents can link up with character but character does not link up with them; for character everything is dispensable except for itself. And so we gladly acknowledge that Moses's personality, from that first murder onward through all the cruelties to follow to his death, offers the supremely imposing and worthy image of a man who is driven by his own nature toward what is greatest. But such an image is utterly undone if we are looking at a powerful, volatile, rash man of action wandering without rhyme or reason for forty years with a monstrous swarm of his people in so small a place and in the very sight of his goal. Merely by shortening both the route and the time which he spent there we have made up for all the nasty things we ventured to say about him and have set him back up in his rightful place.

And so there remains nothing more for us to do but to repeat what we began our observations with. The Holy Scriptures are not harmed, any more than any other tradition, if we apply a critical spirit to them, if we uncover their contradictions, and how often what is original – and better – has been hidden, indeed, has been distorted, by later additions, interpolations and adaptations. The inner, the genuine and original, pristine value comes through all the more robustly and purely; and this it is too which everyone, wittingly or unwittingly, looks for, takes hold of and is instructed by while all that's left over he either tosses out or lets it lie where it falls.

Summary Recapitulation of the second year of the Exodus

	Months	Days
Sojourn at Sinai	1	20
Journey to Kadesh		5
Days at rest		5
Stop on the way. Miriam's illness		7
Absence of the envoys		40
Negotiations with the Edomites		30
Journey to the Arnon		5
Days at rest		5
Mourning for Aaron		40
		—
		157

Thus, six months in total. From this it is quite clear that the march, with whatever delays and pauses and resistance one wishes calculated in, could easily arrive at the Jordan before the end of the second year.

AIDS CLOSER TO HAND

If the Holy Scriptures bring the primeval circumstances and the gradual development of a significant nation vividly to our minds, nevertheless, men such as Michaelis, Eichhorn, Paulus, and Heeren¹⁴¹ demonstrate the nature and immediacy of those traditions far more than we ourselves could have done. And so with respect to more recent times: we derive the greatest benefits from the travel accounts and similar documents which several Westerners – toilsomely and delightedly and not without danger – have brought home and shared for our rich instruction. Here we touch upon only a few men through whose eyes we've been engaged over many years in viewing those far-distant and exceedingly exotic objects.

PILGRIMAGES AND CRUSADES

These innumerable accounts are of course instructive after their fashion; nevertheless, they tend to confuse our imaginations – rather than to assist them – about the most characteristic circumstances of the East. The one-sidedness of the hostile Christian viewpoint limits us through its own limitations; only in more recent times has that view broadened a bit as we've gradually gotten to know the events of those wars through Oriental writers. At the same time we remain gratefully indebted to all those agitated pilgrims and crusaders since we owe the protection and preservation of our cultivated European situation to their religious enthusiasm and to their fierce and tireless battle against aggression from the East.

MARCO POLO

Quite rightly, this outstanding man stands at the head of the list. His journey takes place in the second half of the thirteenth century; he travels to the remotest East, leads us into the strangest situations before which we stand astonished, so fabulous do they seem. Even if the details aren't immediately clear to us, the packed account of this wide-ranging traveller is skilfully designed to arouse in us a sensation of the infinite, of immensity. We find ourselves at the court of Kubla Khan, the successor to Genghis, who rules over boundless territories. For what can one make of an empire and its expanse of which, among much else, it can be said, 'Persia is a large province which consists of nine kingdoms,' and by such a standard of measurement all the rest is to be assessed? Hence, the residence in the north of China, unencompassable; the Khan's palace, a city within a city; the treasures, the weapons, heaped high; officials, soldiers and courtiers beyond all count; and each with his consort summoned to banquet upon banquet. Just such a sojourn in just such a country! The proper means for every pleasure; in particular, an army of hunters and a delight in the hunt over vast expanses. Tame leopards, trained falcons, the liveliest assistants of the hunters, countless prey in heaps. In addition, gifts lavished and received, all year long. Gold and silver, jewels, pearls, every kind of precious object in the possession of the prince and of his favourites; all the while the rest of the millions of underlings have to scrape by on counterfeit coins.¹⁴²

Were we to betake ourselves on a journey out of the capital, we wouldn't be able to tell where the city ends because of the many suburbs. Right away we come upon residence after residence, village upon village and along the majestic river a succession of pleasure gardens. All reckoned by days of travel – and not a few at that.

The traveller commissioned by the emperor now heads toward other areas; he leads us across trackless deserts, then to provinces rich in herds, up mountain ranges, to people of wondrous customs and demeanour, and at the end he lets us gaze across ice and snow toward the eternal night of the Pole. Then suddenly he brings us as on a magic cloak down along the Indian peninsula. Beneath us we glimpse Ceylon, Madagascar, Java; our gaze strays to islands with weird names; and yet, everywhere he lets us learn so many particular qualities of human forms and customs, of landscapes, trees, plants and animals, as to vouch for the truth of his overview, even if much of it may seem fanciful as a fairy tale. Only a well-trained geographer could order and prove all this. We have had to be satisfied with a general impression since neither notes nor annotations were available to aid our first studies.

His journey begins in the year 1320 and his account has come down to us as a book of popular history [*Volksbuch*], though unfortunately a quite shapeless one.¹⁴⁴ It may be acknowledged of the author that he undertook great journeys, saw a great deal and saw it well, and described it accurately to boot. But he likes not only to 'plough with strange heifers'¹⁴⁵ but to slip in fables old and new so that the true loses all credibility. Translated from the original Latin first into Low German, then into High German, the little book suffers from new distortions of its name. Even its translator feels entitled to leave things out and insert others, as our own Görres¹⁴⁶ shows in his worthy book on German popular literature; and in this way both the pleasure and the utility of this important work have been lessened.

Pietro della Valle was born in 1586 into an ancient Roman stock which could trace its lineage back to the noble families of the Roman Republic and at a time when all the kingdoms of Europe enjoyed a high level of intellectual culture. In Italy Tasso was still alive, though in grievous circumstances, yet his poems still had an impact on all superior minds. The art of poetry had spread so widely that improvisers of verse appeared and no young man with signs of talent could forebear to express himself in rhyme. Philology, grammar, rhetoric and style were treated in depth and so our young man grew up educated in all of these superior disciplines.

Exercises with weapons both on foot and on horseback, the noble arts of fencing and riding, served to develop his physical prowess on a daily basis, along with the strength of character with which these are intimately linked. The savage impulse of earlier crusades had by now become further refined into war as an art and the essence of knighthood, with gallantry included as well. We observe our young man paying court to several beauties, particularly in his poems, but in the end, becoming intensely unhappy when the very lady to whom he has devoted himself and with whom he seriously hopes to be united, ignores him and yields to someone unworthy. His grief is boundless; to give himself some breathing space, he decides to go dressed as a pilgrim to the Holy Land.

He reaches Constantinople in 1614 where his aristocratic and engaging nature gains him an excellent reception. Following the pattern of his earlier studies, he flings himself right away into oriental languages, gains an overview of Turkish literature, customs and manners and then – though not without regretting his newly won friends – betakes himself to Egypt. He employs his sojourn there in tracing and tracking down, with the utmost seriousness, the vestiges of the world of antiquity in the modern world; from Cairo he moves on to Mount Sinai to pay his respects to the grave of St Catherine and then returns to Egypt's capital as if coming back from a pleasure trip.

Travelling away for a second time, he reaches Jerusalem in 16 days (and in this way impresses upon our imaginations a true measure of the distance between the two cities). There, while paying reverence to the Holy Sepulchre, he entreats the Saviour, as he had previously entreated St Catherine, to free him from his passion; the scales fall from his eyes and he sees that he has been a fool, she to whom he prayed earlier is really the sole person to whom such reverence is due; his aversion to other members of the female sex has vanished, he scouts around for a spouse and writes to his friends, to whom he hopes soon to return, to seek out a worthy woman for him.

After he has visited and worshipped in all the holy places, for which the recommendation of his friends in Constantinople, but in great measure the services of a Turkish porter¹⁴⁸ provided to accompany him, serve him admirably, he journeys onward with the most complete grasp of these circumstances, reaches Damascus, then Aleppo, where he garbs himself in Syrian dress and lets his beard grow. Here he has a significant adventure which determines his destiny. A traveller joins up with him who can't stop talking about the beauty and kindness of a young Georgian Christian who is making a stopover in Baghdad with her family and Valle, in good Oriental fashion, falls in love with a word-picture towards which he now journeys eagerly. In her presence he feels greater affection and longing; he succeeds in winning over her mother and the father is consulted; but both parents give in only grudgingly to his tempestuous ardour; to relinquish their charming and much-loved daughter strikes them as too great a sacrifice. Finally she does become his wife and at a stroke he gains the greatest treasure both for his life and his travels. For even though he embarked on his pilgrimage equipped with the science and knowledge befitting an aristocrat and though in his observations he was as attentive as he was successful in all that directly concerns human beings and comforted himself in all instances in an exemplary manner; even so, he lacked a knowledge of nature, a science which, at that time, was practised solely in a narrow circle of solemn and circumspect scholars. For this reason he can only partially satisfy the demands of his friends who ask for information about plants and trees, spices and medicaments; and yet, the lovely Maani,¹⁴⁹ a kind family doctor, knows about how roots and herbs and flowers grow, knows about the resins, balms, oils, seeds and woods which can be purchased and can provide an adequate account which serves to enrich her husband's observation according to local custom.

But this relationship is even more important in his life and his travels. While wholly feminine, Maani displays a character that is resolute and equal to every circumstance; she fears no danger, indeed, she looks for it and wherever she goes she behaves calmly and nobly. She mounts her horse like a man, she is skilled at reining it in and spurring it on; she remains ever a spirited and stirring companion. Equally important is the fact that while they're underway she comes into contact with all the women¹⁵⁰ and while her husband is well received by the men, she is housed and maintained since she knows how to act and busy herself, as women do, with their wives.

At this point, however, the young couple come to enjoy an unfamiliar piece of good fortune for the first time in their wanderings through the empire of the Turks. They enter Persia in the thirtieth year of the reign of 'Abbas the Second who, like Peter and Friedrich, merited the title 'the Great'.¹⁵¹ After a precarious and fear-ridden youth he became aware as soon as he acceded to his rule, and in the clearest possible way, that to protect his kingdom he had to extend its boundaries and by whatever means were at hand to secure his internal dominion as well; at the same time, his every thought and wish is bent on restoring his depopulated realm with foreigners as well as on encouraging and facilitating the return of his own people through public roads and inns. He devotes revenues and patronage massively to innumerable building projects: Isfahan, ennobled as the capital, strewn with palaces and gardens, caravanserais and residences, for royal guests; a suburb constructed for the Armenians who in displaying their gratitude are shrewd enough to find continual opportunities, in acting on behalf of the royal account as well as their own, for gaining profit and tribute for the prince at the same time. Another suburb for the Georgians, yet another for the followers of the fire-worshippers, extend the city still further until at last it stretches out, as limitless as one of our imperial centres. Roman Catholic divines, especially Carmelites, are received hospitably and given protection; less so the Greek Orthodox who appear to belong amongst the enemies of both Europe and Asia since they stand under the protection of the Turks.

Della Valle stayed for over a year in Isfahan and was continually active during his time there so that he could gain precise information about all conditions and circumstances. How vivid are his depictions as a result! How exact his reports! In the end, having sampled everything he was still missing the summit of all: a personal acquaintance with the emperor, whom he so deeply admired, along with a sense of how matters stood in the court, in military encounters, in the army.

In the district of Mazandaran, on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, in a quite swampy and insalubrious region, the restless, ever active prince had founded a large city, called Ferhabad, and populated it with a designated citizenry; simultaneously he had many a mountain stronghold constructed in the vicinity on the heights above a valley shaped like an amphitheatre, not far from his Russian and Turkish enemies, in a spot protected by mountain ridges. There he habitually resided and there della Valle sought him out. He arrives with Maani, is well received, is presented – after a cautious and cunning Oriental delay – to the king, obtains his favour and is admitted to banquets and drinking parties where he is expected above all to provide an account of European conditions, customs and religious beliefs to the well-informed but curious prince.

In the Orient generally but in Persia particularly, a certain innocence and naivety of demeanour runs through all social levels up to the foot of the throne. Naturally, at the upper level there is a distinct formality during audiences, at table and elsewhere; still, a sort of carnival laxity soon emerges in the emperor's ambience which has quite a jocular aspect. When the emperor is revelling in his gardens and pavilions nobody may step in his boots on the carpets where the court happens to be. If a Tartar prince arrives, his boot is removed but since he is unused to standing on one leg he begins to wobble and now the emperor himself steps up and holds him until the removal is complete. Towards evening the emperor stands in the middle of a circle in which golden chalices filled with wine circulate; several of these are of average weight while a few, thanks to a reinforced base, are so heavy that the unwitting guest spills the wine, if indeed he doesn't drop the cup itself, to the enormous amusement of the ruler and others in the know. They keep on drinking in this circular fashion until one of them, no longer capable of standing upright, is led away or slips away at an opportune moment. At parting no obeisance is made to the emperor, one after another simply disappears until the ruler remains alone, listens for a while to some melancholy music and finally betakes himself to his bed. Still stranger stories are told coming from the harem where the women tickle their lord and master, wrestle with him and try to pin him to the rug while he tries amid uproarious laughter to defend himself and get his own back solely with grumbled insults.

When we hear such rollicking things about private amusements in the royal harem, we shouldn't suppose that the prince and his ministers were idle or negligent. It wasn't only the restless and active spirit of Abbas the Great which drove him to construct a second capital on the Caspian Sea. True, Ferhabad was quite favourably situated for hunting and other courtly enjoyments but, protected as it was by a mountain range, it was also close enough to the border that the emperor could hear of every movement of the Russians and the Turks, his arch-enemies, in a timely way and meet them with counter-measures. There was little to fear from the Russians at the moment, internally their realm was shaken by usurpers and princely imposters and was quite unstable. By contrast, the emperor had defeated the Turks some twelve years earlier in a most successful battle, with the result that he had nothing more to gain from that quarter; indeed, he had

wrested huge tracts of land from them. Nevertheless, between such neighbours no genuine peace could ever be concluded; teasing provocations and public demonstrations kept both sides on continual alert.

Even so, at this moment 'Abbas feels impelled to quite serious preparations for war. Utterly in keeping with immemorial style he summons his entire army onto the ex-panses of Azerbaijan and it presses forward in all its divisions, on horseback and on foot, armed with every sort of weapon; an unending baggage train along with it. For each soldier brings his wives, children and goods along as if prepared for emigration. Della Valle too brings his lovely Maani and her women, mounted on horseback, behind the army and the court, and the emperor praises him for this because by so doing he has shown himself to be a man worthy of esteem.

When an entire nation such as this sets out massively on the move, it cannot be lacking in anything which it might need at home; and for this reason salesmen and merchants of all sorts tag along too, setting up temporary bazaars everywhere and counting on brisk business. The imperial camp may be likened at all times to a city in which policing and public order are so well arranged, and penalty so cruel, that nobody need forage or commandeer, let alone plunder but rather, everything must be paid for by people great and small in cash. As a result not only the cities which lie along the route are abundantly stocked with supplies but provisions as well as necessities pour in unstoppably from more distant provinces.

Still, what strategic, what tactical operations might be expected from such organised disarray? Particularly when one learns that all divisions – those of tribe as well as of armament – mingle indiscriminately on the battlefield and – without anyone assigned to front, middle or rear, but just as chance has it – fight in a welter of confusion. For this reason, a fortunate victory can be easily undone and a single lost battle can determine the fate of a kingdom for years to come.

On this occasion, however, no such frightful clash of fists or of weapons takes place. True, they press with inconceivable hardship through the mountains; but they delay, the foe will perish in the devastated countryside. Panicked alarms, hollow proclamations of victory, reel back and forth; fervently rejected, proudly rebuffed peace conditions, feigned pugnacity, crafty stalling manoeuvres at first delay peace and then make it possible. And now, on the emperor's command, and on pain of punishment, everyone moves out without any further duress or danger than what he has already encountered on the packed and thronging way and returns home at once.

We encounter della Valle again at Qazvin, close to the court, and dissatisfied that the campaign against the Turks came to so speedy a conclusion. For we have to regard him not simply as an inquisitive traveller, as an adventurer blown hither and yon by happenstance; on the contrary, he cultivates his goals and pursues them relentlessly. At that period Persia was truly a country for foreigners; the generosity of Abbas, extended over long years, attracted many a bold spirit, it wasn't yet an age of formal embassies, skilful travellers could make themselves valued. At an earlier period, Shirley, an Englishman, had already taken it upon himself to play the intermediary between East and West.¹⁵² And so too della Valle, independent, wealthy, aristocratic, cultured and well recommended, gains access to the court and strives to foment hostilities against the Turks. He is motivated by the same Christian sentiment which stirred the Crusaders; he had seen, and had partly suffered, the mistreatment of pious pilgrims at the Holy Sepulchre, and all western nations were anxious that Constantinople be harried from the East. 'Abbas, however, mistrusted the Christians; thinking only of their own advantage, they had never supported him. And now he had come to an understanding with the Turks. Even so, della Valle doesn't relent but seeks to forge a tie between Persia and the Black Sea Cossacks. He comes back to Isfahan intending to settle there and promote Roman Catholicism. He first gathers his wife's relatives around him, then draws still more Christians from Georgia, he adopts a Georgian orphan girl, he stays with the Carmelites, and has nothing less in mind than to receive a piece of land from the emperor in order to found a new Rome.

At this point the emperor himself appears once again in Isfahan; envoys from all parts of the globe stream hither. Mounted on horseback, on the grandest of all squares, in the company of his soldiers and eminent retainers as well as distinguished guests, the noblest of whom are present on horseback with full cortège, the ruler grants jocular audiences; gifts are presented with swaggering grandeur but are quickly and arrogantly scorned, then haggled over in the manner of Jewish merchants, and in this way majesty hovers continually between the extremes of the loftiest and the basest. Later, now secretly sequestered in his harem, now acting before all eyes, thrusting himself into every public matter, the emperor manifests his presence in tireless and headstrong dealings.

Throughout all this, however, a certain freewheeling mentality in matters of religion is apparent. Nevertheless, no Muslim can be converted to Christianity; and he no longer takes any pleasure in conversions to Islam, which he once favoured. One is more or less free to believe and practise what one will. Thus, the Armenians celebrate the Baptism of the Cross in their splendid district, through which the river Sandarud runs, in the most sumptuous manner.¹⁵³ Not only will the emperor attend this function with a huge retinue but even here he cannot leave off issuing orders and directions. First of all he discusses with the clergy what plans they may have in mind, then he springs back and forth, rides hither and yon, commanding order and calm on the procession with the same exactitude that he uses on his troops. When the ceremony has concluded, he assembles the clerics and other important men about him and discusses all sorts of religious opinions and customs with them. This free and open attitude towards believers of other persuasions isn't merely the emperor's personal trait; it may be found generally among the Shi'is. These adherents of 'Ali, who was originally barred from the caliphate and then murdered after finally acceding to it, can be considered in many respects an oppressed Muslim faction; their hatred is directed principally against the Sunnis who recognise and revere the caliphs who intervened between Muhammad and 'Ali.¹⁵⁴ The Turks subscribe to this [Sunnii] belief and so a gulf as much political as religious divides the Persians and the Turks. Though the Shi'is hate the members of their own religious community who differ from them in matters of doctrine, they are indifferent to members of other faiths and accord them, far more than to their actual adversaries, a certain favoured acceptance.

Even so, it's bad enough! For liberality groans under the pressures of the emperor's arbitrary wilfulness. Whether to populate or depopulate a kingdom is pretty much the same to a despotic will. 'Abbas, slinking around the countryside in disguise, overhears the grumbling of some Armenian women and takes such personal umbrage that he inflicts the cruellest collective punishments on the male inhabitants of the village. Terror and anxiety spread along the banks of the Sandarud; the suburb of Khalfa, once cheered by imperial participation in their solemn rite, is now plunged into the profoundest grief.

And so we are continually sharing the emotions of great peoples alternately exalted and debased by despotism. We are amazed to what a high level of security and well-being 'Abbas as sole ruler raised the kingdom and at the same time ascribe such durability to this circumstance that the weakness, folly and inconsequential behaviour of his successors could run the empire completely into the ground only after ninety years; and yet, then we surely have to bring out the obverse of this impressive image.

Since every rule by one man rejects all influence and has to preserve the ruler's personality in the strictest security, it follows inevitably that a despot must continually suspect treachery, sense danger everywhere, and even fear violence from every quarter, simply because it is through violence alone that he himself holds claim to his lofty position. As a result he is jealous of everyone other than himself who inspires esteem and confidence or displays dazzling skills or collects treasures and appears to rival him in his activity. Nevertheless, it is the successor who in every respect inspires suspicion most. It is the mark of a lofty spirit in a royal father if he can gaze without envy upon his son to whom, not long hence, nature will irretrievably transfer – without any consent from their strong-willed owner – all the possessions and acquisitions he himself once held. Conversely, the son is enjoined as the noble, refined and tasteful person he is, to moderate his expectations, conceal his wishes and not even seem to snatch at paternal destiny prematurely. Still and all, where is human nature so pure and grand, so serenely willing to wait-and-see, so joyously active under imperative conditions, that in such a situation, a father might fail to complain about a son, a son about a father! Even if both of them are angelically upright, people will whisper in their ears and come between them, inadvertence will be converted into crime, semblance to hard proof. How many examples does history provide us! We have only to call to mind the deplorable domestic labyrinth in which we saw King Herod trapped. It isn't only those closest to him who keep him in wavering peril but a remarkable child, foretold by prophecy, arouses his anxieties and prompts a widespread atrocity just before his death.

Thus the same fate befell 'Abbas the Great. Sons and grandsons fell under suspicion and gave cause for suspicion; one of them, quite innocent, was murdered while another, only partly innocent, was blinded. This latter said: 'You have not only taken the light from me but from the empire itself.'

To such wretched crimes of despotism yet another such act becomes unavoidably linked and in this way inadvertent and unforeseen acts of violence and lawlessness proliferate. Every human being is governed by his habits, he will comport himself moderately only when hemmed in by exterior strictures and moderation itself becomes habit. But quite the opposite occurs in the case of the despot; an unhindered will mounts of its own accord and if not checked from outside, surges towards the absolutely limitless. Here we discover the solution to the riddle of how out of an admirable young prince whose early years of rule are graced with blessing, a tyrant little by little emerges, to the blight of the world and the destruction of his own kin (who themselves are compelled, more often than not, to come up with an effective remedy for this torment).

Unfortunately, that striving for the absolute which is innate to man and demands all his strength turns even more terrible in its effects when a physical stimulus is joined to it. This results in the most extreme intensification which is resolved only, luckily enough, in complete numbness. We mean the excessive use of wine which momentarily shatters the paltry boundaries of tranquil righteousness and equity, which even the tyrant cannot as a human being fully repudiate, and wreaks a havoc without bounds. Should we apply what we've said to 'Abbas the Great who throughout his fifty-year reign exalted himself as the sole wielder of will in his vast and populous kingdom; should we consider him, free-spirited, sociable and good-tempered, then led astray through suspicion, vexation and – worst of all – a

twisted love of righteousness, and inflamed by heavy drinking, and, to cap it off, wracked by a vile and incurable bodily ailment and reduced to despair – should we consider all this, we may concede that those who put a stop to so horrific a presence on earth are worthy of our forgiveness if not our praise. We laud those cultured people and think them blessed whose monarch rules himself with a noble ethical awareness; felicitous too are those moderate, constitutionally limited governments which the ruler himself has every reason to love and promote because they relieve him of many a responsibility and preserve him from many a regret.

Not only the prince, however, but everyone who wins a share of the supreme power through trust, favour or usurpation, runs the danger of overstepping the circle which law and custom, fellow feeling, conscience, religion and tradition have traced for the happiness and well-being of the human race. Hence, ministers and favourites, the representatives of the people, and the people itself, should be on their guard that they too not be sucked into the whirlpool of unrestricted will and bring both themselves and others irretrievably to destruction.

Returning now to our traveller, we find him in an uneasy situation. Notwithstanding his great predilection for the Orient, della Valle must feel in the end that he is dwelling in a land in which no further success is to be expected, a land in which with the purest will and the most strenuous activity a new Rome cannot be founded. His wife's relatives are not constrained by family ties for a moment; after having dwelt in Isfahan in the most intimate family circle, they deem it more advantageous to move back to the Euphrates and take up their accustomed way of life once again. The rest of the Georgians prove listless; even the Carmelites, for whom the great project must lie especially close to their hearts, can get neither interest nor support out of Rome.

Della Valle's zeal cools; he decides to return to Europe, but unfortunately, at the least favourable season. It strikes him as intolerable to go by way of the desert; he resolves to travel via India. At this very moment, however, military manoeuvres begin between the Portuguese, the Spanish and the English over Hormuz, the most important trading-place, and 'Abbas believes that it is in his interest to get involved. The emperor decides to fight against his troublesome Portuguese neighbours and to expel them, and then to thwart the intentions of the ever helpful English, perhaps through intrigue and delay, and to seize their profits for himself.

At this critical juncture, that startling and singular sensation, which sets people mightily at odds with themselves, surprises our travellers – that sense of great remoteness from our homeland at the very moment when, ill at ease in foreign parts, we are heading home, and in fact, yearning to be there already. In such circumstances it's almost impossible to ward off impatience; even our friend is bestirred and his robust character, his firm and noble self-assurance deceive him as to the difficulties which lie before him. His audacity in the face of all odds has in the past enabled him to overcome every obstacle, to realise all plans; he flatters himself that he will enjoy the same good fortune and since a return through the desert appears intolerable, he resolves to go via India, accompanied by his lovely Maani and her foster-daughter Mariuccia.

Many troubling events occur, harbingers of danger ahead; still, he travels through Persepolis and Shiraz, ever on the alert, precisely noting and recording objects, manners and local customs. In this way he reaches the Persian Gulf only to discover, as might have been expected, that the harbours are closed and all ships confiscated, in keeping with wartime practices. In a highly insalubrious spot on the coast he comes upon an encampment of Englishmen whose caravans are halted as well while they await a favourable opportunity. He is warmly received and joins up with them, sets his tent up next to theirs along with a palm-thatched hut for great comfort. And here a kindly star seems to shine down upon him! His marriage had been childless; to the great joy of both man and wife, Maani proclaims herself expectant. But now he falls ill, a poor diet and unhealthy air work their worst upon him, and unfortunately, upon Maani too; she gives birth prematurely and remains feverish. Even without medical assistance, she retains her staunch character for a while yet but then, feeling her end upon her, she yields in pious serenity, asks to be borne out of the palm-hut and into the tent and there, with Mariuccia holding the sacred candles and della Valle performing the traditional prayers, she expires in his arms. She was twenty-three years old.

To soften so monstrous a loss he decides firmly and irrevocably to bring her remains back for burial to Rome. He is lacking in resins, balsams and precious herbs but luckily he discovers a shipment of the best camphor, which can preserve a body, if artfully applied by skilled individuals.

As a result of this, however, he takes on the greatest hindrances, in that he will have henceforth to soothe or pay off now the superstitions of camel-drivers, now the greedy prejudices of officials, now the vigilance of customs agents, through the entire journey ahead.

We travel with him to Lar, the capital of Laristan, where he finds better air and a good reception; and the Persians are expected to capture Hormuz. But their victory avails him not. He is forced back yet again to Shiraz until at last he travels to India on an English ship. Here we find that his comportment is as it was earlier. His solid courage, his knowledge, his noble traits afford him an easy entrée and gracious reception everywhere. Nevertheless, at the last he is again forced back to the Persian Gulf and compelled to travel home through the desert.

There he endures all the rigours he had dreaded. Plundered by tribal chieftains, extorted by customs officials, robbed by the desert Arabs and everywhere, even in Christian regions, cheated and hindered, he manages even so to bring back curiosities and precious objects galore to Rome, with the strangest and most precious of all being the body of his beloved Maani. Once there he performs magnificent obsequies at Ara Coeli; and when he climbs down into the grave to bestow the final honours upon her, there are two maidens beside him: Silvia, presumably the daughter who has grown up during his absence, and Tinatin di Ziba, whom formerly we knew as Mariuccia, both of whom are around fifteen years old. He now decides to marry the second of these, who has been a faithful companion on the journey and his sole consolation since the death of his wife, and to do so against the wishes of his relatives – and indeed, of the Pope himself – who have nobler and wealthier connections in mind for him. Now, resplendent for several years yet, he bestirs his fierce and bold and daring nature, and not without clashes, danger and vexation, manages to leave behind at his death, which comes in his sixty-sixth year, a swarming progeny.

APOLOGY

It is worth noting that everyone favours the way in which he arrives at knowledge and insight over all other ways and wants to encourage and initiate those who come after him to follow the same ways. For this reason I've presented Peter della Valle at some length, for he was the traveller through whom the characteristic features of the Orient first came home to me with great clarity; and I can presume to say that I first gained the footing and foundation for my *West-Eastern Divan* through his presentation. May this serve others as a stimulus, in a time which is so rich in papers and pamphlets, to pore over a volume through which they may arrive firmly in a realm of great significance, a world which may seem superficially altered but which is fundamentally the very same which once presented itself to this exceptional man in his day and age.

Whoever wants to understand the poet must go to the poet's land; let him rejoice that in the Orient whatever's old is ever new.

The page count of the studies we've printed up till now reminds us to proceed more cautiously and with fewer digressions. For this reason we speak of the above-named, and quite excellent, man merely in passing. It is remarkable to consider various nations in their travellers. We find the English, amongst whom we pass over Shirley and Herbert very reluctantly; then the Italians; and lastly, the French. Now let a German step forth here in his strength and dignity. Unfortunately he teamed up with a man on his journey to the Persian court who appears as more of an adventurer than an envoy but behaved in both guises pigheadedly, clumsily and indeed, foolishly.¹⁵⁶ The uprightness of the excellent Olearius was not misled by all this; he provides us with enormously enjoyable and instructive travel accounts which are all the more valuable because he arrived in Persia only a few years after della Valle and just after the death of 'Abbas the Great; upon his return he made Sa'di the Excellent known to Germans through his skilled and delightful translation. We break off unwillingly here for we also want to express our profound gratitude to this man for the great good we owe him. We find ourselves in a similar situation with respect to the following two men whose merits we can only superficially touch upon as well.

The first of these, a goldsmith and jeweller, presses his way with shrewd deliberation into the courts of the Orient all the while displaying the precious and exquisite wares he promotes, and is everywhere conscious of where he should be and where he may go. He reaches the diamond mines of India and after a hazardous trip home, receives a rather chilly welcome. His posthumous writings are extremely informative and yet, he is not so much obstructed during his lifetime by his countryman, successor and rival Chardin as besmirched in public opinion after his death. The latter, who at the very outset of his travels must grapple with the severest obstacles, grasps just how to work expertly upon the mentality of oriental potentates and plutocrats, which fluctuates between magnanimity and meanness, and knows also how to minister in manifold ways to their insatiable craving for fresh gems and exotic goldsmithery – no matter how great the treasures they already possess – and as a result he returns home not lacking in good fortune and standing.

The intelligence, equanimity, proficiency, perseverance, charming comportment and steadfastness of both of these men are admirable beyond measure; every man of the world could take them as models to esteem on his own journey through life. And yet, they possessed two advantages not granted to everyone: they were at once Protestants and Frenchmen – qualities which when found together are capable of producing supremely capable individuals.

RECENT AND MOST RECENT TRAVELLERS

There is no need here to touch upon what we owe to the eighteenth and even the nineteenth centuries. In recent times the English have enlightened us about the most unknown regions. The kingdom of Kabul, ancient Gedrosia and Caramania have become accessible to us.¹⁵⁸ Who could restrain his gaze so as not to skim over the Indus and recognise the huge activity which grips it daily on all sides? And so, thus encouraged, the yearning for farther and deeper knowledge of languages must continually spread. If we consider what strides both mind and body have made to reach from the confined Hebrew and Rabbinic sphere to the breadth and depth of Sanskrit, one really has to rejoice at being a witness to this progress over so many years. Even wars which obstruct and destroy so much have brought many additions to basic insight. The territories on both banks of the Indus, from the Himalayas on down, which formerly were merely fabulous to us, appear clearly now in relation to the rest of the world. We can now extend our view as we please, and as our powers and opportunities permit, across the subcontinent down to Java and learn the most specific details. In this way one door after another lies open to younger friends of the Orient – to get to know the mysteries of that primal world, the defects of a singular cast of mind and a wretched religion, alongside the splendour of its poetry, in which pure humanity, noble manners, serenity and love take flight; to take comfort in the quarrels of castes, in fantastic monsters of religion and in abstruse mysticism; and in the end to come to the conviction that, even so, in all this, the salvation of humanity is preserved.

TEACHERS

DEPARTED OR STILL LIVING

It is a difficult, almost impossible task to furnish an exact account of those from whom we learned this or that during the course of our life and our studies, as well as of how we were encouraged not solely by friends and comrades but also by adversaries and foes. Even so, I feel impelled to name several men to whom I owe particular gratitude.

*Jones*¹⁵⁹

This man's merits are so renowned around the world and so thoroughly celebrated in more than one place that nothing remains for me but to acknowledge generally that I have striven to draw every possible benefit from his endeavours. Nevertheless, I do want to indicate one aspect which seems especially remarkable to me.

In keeping with the true English way of education, grounded in Greek and Latin literature to such an extent that he was not only capable of appreciating them justly but could work in them as well, and also fully conversant with European literature, once having strayed into Oriental literatures, he enjoyed the fine twofold gift of being able to esteem each nation on its own most characteristic merits while at the same time discovering everywhere that beauty and goodness which each necessarily shared with the other.

He had considerable difficulty in communicating his insights, even so. The predilection of his countrymen for old classical literature stood principally in his way. To observe him closely is easily to become aware that, clever man that he was, he sought to link the unknown with the known, and that which deserved to be appreciated with that which already was appreciated. He concealed his partiality for Oriental poetic art and with nimble modesty, gave mostly such examples as he could set beside the most admired Latin and Greek poems; he employed the ancient rhythmic forms to make the tender audacities of the Orient accessible to Classicists. Nevertheless, he must have experienced considerable vexation not only from Classical philologists but from patriots; the contempt for Oriental poetry pained him; this glimmers clearly forth from his half-ironical essay, merely two pages long, '*Arabs, sive de Poësi Anglorum Dialogus*', at the conclusion of his work on the Asiatic art of poetry.¹⁶⁰ Here, with manifest bitterness, he shows us how ridiculous Milton and Pope would look in Oriental garb; from which it follows that, as we have said more than once, every poet has to be viewed, known and assessed in his own language and in the distinctive circumstances of his time and customs.

*Eichhorn*¹⁶¹

With delighted recognition I note that in my current labours I am still using the same copy of his edition of Jones's Works with which this much esteemed man honoured me some forty-two years ago, when we still had him here among us and received so much that was beneficial and instructive from his mouth. I followed his course of instruction the whole time in silence and in the final days I was immensely pleased to receive, complete and from his own hand, the extremely important work, which elucidates the Prophets¹⁶² and their circumstances for us. For what is more delightful, for the man of calm understanding as well as for the excitable poet, than to see how those God-possessed men regarded their agitated milieu and signalled the wondrous-solemn thing that went forth castigating, warning, comforting and exalting hearts on high.

With these few remarks may my grateful and lifelong esteem for this worthy man be faithfully expressed.

*Lorsbach*¹⁶³

To call the doughty Lorsbach to mind is also an obligation here. He was older when he came into our circle where he in no way found any congenial place; even so, he willingly gave me sound information on everything about which I asked him, just as long as it lay within the sphere of his expertise, which he frequently circumscribed too sharply.

Initially it struck me as wondrous to discover in him no particular friend of Oriental poetry; and yet, the same thing could happen to anyone who lovingly and enthusiastically spends his time and effort on an enterprise and only at the end fails to find the expected gain. Then too, old age is the time in which a man's pleasure in things dwindles just when he needs it most. His understanding and his integrity were equally gladsome and I always recall the hours which I spent with him with pleasure.

Von Diez

The prelate von Diez¹⁶⁴ had a significant influence on my studies which I gratefully acknowledge. At the time when I was occupying myself more closely with Oriental literature, the *Book of Kabus* fell into my hands and seemed so important to me that I devoted a great deal of time to it and urged several friends to take notice of it. Through a traveller I offered this estimable man, to whom I owe so much instruction, a courteous greeting. In return he was friendly enough to send me his little book on tulips. I arranged to have a small area on silken paper adorned with a splendid golden flower border and there I wrote:

How one strolls with prudence on the earth,
Whether up mountains or descending from the throne,
And how one handles people as one handles horses –
All this is what the king teaches his son.
We know this now through You who bestowed it on us;
Now you join the tulip's blossom to it,
And if the golden frame didn't limit me
Where would all you've done for us conclude?

And so an epistolary conversation began which this eminent man continued faithfully, in an almost illegible handwriting, amid all his pains and sufferings, to the end.

Since I had been until then familiar with the manners and history of the Orient only in a general fashion, and utterly unfamiliar with its languages, such a friendship was of the greatest importance to me. Since a prescribed and methodical approach for the sake of mere momentary comprehension would have demanded an expenditure of time and energy searching in books, I turned to him in puzzling instances and always got satisfactory and helpful replies to my questions. These letters of his certainly deserve to be published on account of their contents and displayed as a memorial to his learning and benevolence. Since I knew of his strict and idiosyncratic nature, I restrained myself from approaching him from a certain angle; even so, when I expressed a desire to get to know the character of Nasreddin Hoja, the merry travel and camp companion of Timur the World-Conqueror, he was obliging enough – quite against his own inclination – to translate some anecdotes for me. From these it emerged, however, that many a lively tale, which Westerners treat after their own fashion, derives from the Orient, even though the authentic tint, the true and actual tone, have been largely lost in the transmission.

Since the manuscript of this book is now in the Royal Library in Berlin, it would be extremely desirable for a master of this discipline to give us a translation. It might be best if this were to be done in the Latin language so that scholars could get a good grasp of it first of all. Then a nice abridged version might be prepared for the German public.

That I shared and derived benefit from my friend's other writings, such as the *Denkwürdigkeiten des Orients*,¹⁶⁵ and the rest, the present book bears witness; it's a bit trickier to admit that his quarrelsomeness, which wasn't always commendable, was very helpful to me as well. Nevertheless, one has only to call his university years to mind, when he raced to the duelling ground whenever two masters or seniors essayed skill and dexterity against one another, nor can anyone deny that on such occasions, he witnessed strengths and weaknesses which perhaps would have remained hidden forever from a student.

The author of the book *Kabus*, Kay-Ka'us, king of the Daylamites who inhabited the mountainous land of Gilan, which ends to the south of the Caspian Sea, will become doubly dear to us as we get to know him better.¹⁶⁶ As a crown prince carefully reared for the freest and most active sort of life, he left his homeland both to form his character and to prove himself in the far-flung East.

Shortly after the death of Mahmud, whose many praise-worthy deeds we have mentioned, he came to Ghazna, was warmly welcomed by Mahmud's son Mas'ud and as a result of many services in both war and peace, married one of his sisters. At a court where not long before Firdowsi had written the *Shah-nameh*, where a large assemblage of poets and talented men still flourished, and where the new ruler, bold and bellicose as his father, appreciated scintillating society, Kay-Ka'us was able to find the most valuable scope for further self-improvement on his wanderings.

But we must first speak of his education. His father had handed him over to an excellent teacher to push his physical development to the utmost. This teacher brought the son home skilled in all knightly exercises: shooting, riding, shooting while riding, spear-throwing, swinging the mallet and striking the ball most effectively. After all of this was successfully accomplished and the king seemed to be satisfied, even praising the teacher to the skies, he added: 'I have just one thing to remind you of. You've instructed my son in everything for which he requires some external device; without a horse he cannot ride, without a bow he cannot shoot, what good is his arm when he has no lance, and what good is a game without a mallet and ball? You haven't taught him the one thing for which he needs only himself and which is the most necessary and which no one else can help him to do.' The teacher stood ashamed; he realised that the prince was unable to swim. Despite some reluctance on the prince's part, this too was imparted, and it saved his life when he went on pilgrimage to Mecca with a great crowd of pilgrims and was one of a few to escape when they were wrecked on the Euphrates.

That he had been educated to the same high level in intellectual matters is attested by the good reception he enjoyed at the court of Ghazna; such that he was named one of the prince's companions – a high honour at the time – because he must have been accomplished, as well as genial and intelligent enough, to give a good account of himself on all occasions.

On account of powerful neighbours, greedy for conquest, the succession in Gilan was uncertain; uncertain too was the very control of the kingdom. Finally, after the death of his royal father, himself once deposed then reinstated, Kay-Ka'us acceded to the throne in the fullness of his wisdom and with steely resignation to the possible consequences of his action; in his old age, foreseeing that his son Gilan Shah would have an even more dangerous situation than his own, he wrote this remarkable book in which he addresses his son 'so that he might inform him in the arts and the sciences on a twofold basis, either to gain his livelihood through an art should he find himself reduced to need by fate, or in the event that he may not need an art to gain his livelihood, that he may at least be well instructed in the fundamentals of every matter, should he remain in majesty.'

Had such a book come in our day and age into the hands of those noble émigrés who often, with exemplary resignation, sustain themselves with the work of their own hands, how comforting it would have been to them!

That such an excellent, indeed invaluable, book is no longer known may have as its cause that the author published it at his own expense and the firm of Nicolai took it on only on commission; whereby even for such a work in a bookshop a lag can occur. Nevertheless, so that the father-land may know what riches await it, we list the contents of the chapters here and we ask such reliable daily papers as the *Morgenblatt* and the *Gesellschafter* to make the anecdotes and stories – as edifying as they are delightful – along with the great, incomparable maxims which this work contains, widely known in the interim.

*Contents of the Kabus Nameh by Chapter*¹⁶⁷

Knowledge of God
Praise of the Prophets
God is to be praised
Worship of God in full is both necessary and useful
Responsibilities towards one's father and mother
Raising one's station through virtue
According to what rules one must speak
Nushirvan's last rules
Circumstances of old age and youth
Proper manners at table
Comportment when drinking wine
How to invite and accommodate guests
How jokes are to be made; how backgammon and chess must be played
The conduct of lovers
Advantages and disadvantages of cohabitation
How one must wash and bathe
The state of sleep and of rest
Procedures in hunting
How to play polo
How to confront the enemy
Ways of increasing wealth
How to preserve property in trust and how to return it
Purchase of slaves and slave-girls
Where one must buy real estate
Horse-trading and characteristics of the best horses
How one ought to take a wife
The procedure in educating children
Advantages in making and choosing friends
Precautions against the onslaughts of enemies
It is meritorious to forgive
How one must seek out knowledge
Business dealings
Rules for physicians; how one must live
Principles of astrology
Qualities of poets and the art of poetry
Rules for musicians
How to serve emperors
Status of the emperor's confidants and companions
Protocols of the chancery
The vizier's office
Protocols for a general

Protocols for an emperor
Rules for farmers and cultivators
The merits of virtue

Just as a book with such contents can unquestionably offer one an extensive knowledge of Oriental conditions, there's no doubt as well that one will find numerous points of comparison to his own European situation to provide both edification and occasion for comment.

In conclusion, a brief chronological recapitulation. King Kay-Ka'us acceded to his rule in approximately 450 ah (1058 ad), reigned until 473 ah (1080 ad), married a daughter of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna. His son Gilan Shah, for whom he wrote this work, was despoiled of his territories. Little is known of his life, and nothing of his death.¹⁶⁸ See Diez's translation (Berlin, 1811).

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The bookshop which has taken over this previously announced work in press or on commission is requested to make itself known. A low price will ease its diffusion, which is highly desirable.

Von Hammer¹⁶⁹

My little book makes plain in all its parts how indebted I am to this estimable man. I'd been aware of Hafiz and his poetry for a long time but whatever literature, travel reports, journalism and the like brought before me gave me no conception, no glimpse, of the worth and merit of this extraordinary man. But when at last, in the spring of 1813, the complete translation of all his works reached me, I grasped his innermost nature with particular affection and sought to position myself in relation to him through my own work. This amiable occupation helped me through some difficult times and allowed me to taste the fruits of hard-won peace in the most delightful of ways.

For several years I'd been generally aware of the flourishing enterprise of the *Fundgruben*¹⁷⁰ but now came the time when I might profit from it. Over numerous pages this work interpreted and simultaneously aroused and satisfied the needs of the time; for me the experience showed how true it is that in every field we are supported by our contemporaries in a most excellent fashion so long as one avails himself of their merits with gratitude and affection. Learned men teach us about the past, they provide the vantage point on which the actions of a moment transpire, they point out the next way forward which we must tread. Happily the aforementioned splendid work is still being continued with the same zeal; and even if one comes from behind in his investigations in this field, one always comes back with pleasure and renewed interest to what has been offered to us here in fresh and useful form on so many pages.

Nevertheless, I have to admit that this important collection would have helped me more expeditiously if the editor (who, to be sure, works and contributes only for accomplished scholars) had paid some attention to lay readers and amateurs as well and prefaced, if not all, yet several of the essays with a brief introduction to the conditions of past epochs, the personalities, and the locales. Certainly those eager to learn would have been thereby spared a great deal of tedious and distracted rummaging about.

Still, everything which formerly remained a mere desideratum has now become ours in ample measure through this inestimable work which transmits the history of Persian poetry to us. For I gladly acknowledge that in 1814, when the *Göttinger Anzeige* made the first preliminary announcement of its contents, I immediately organised and rearranged my studies in accord with the rubrics that were given, and in this way gained a considerable advantage. But when the impatiently awaited work finally appeared in its entirety, one landed all at once in a world that was familiar, the conditions of which could be clearly discerned and considered in individual detail, where otherwise things would have been glimpsed only in the most general outlines through shifting layers of fog.

May my use of this work find some measure of favour, as well as my intention of also luring those who might have set this accumulated treasure off to one side over the course of their lives.

Certainly we now possess a foundation upon which Persian literature can be splendidly and visibly established; and by its example, other literatures may win status and support. It remains extremely desirable, nevertheless, that the chronological arrangement be preserved rather than making an attempt at a systematic presentation according to the various genres. For the Oriental poets everything is too mixed up together to enable anyone to single out the individual aspect; only the character of the period and that of the poet in his period are instructive and have a quickening effect on everyone; as the discussion has transpired here may it ever remain.

May the merits of the radiant Shirin and of the darling and gravely edifying clover-leaf, which brings us delight at the very end of our work, be acknowledged everywhere.¹⁷¹

Since Germans approach the Orient ever more closely through translations of all sorts, we feel impelled at this point to adduce a matter which though certainly well enough known cannot be repeated too often.

There are three kinds of translation. The first makes a foreign country known to us on our own terms; here a plain prose translation works best. While prose completely effaces the idiosyncrasies of every sort of poetic art and even drags poetic enthusiasm down to the lowest level, it still performs the greatest service at the outset for it surprises us with foreign excellence in the very midst of our domestic and common life as a nation, without our even realising what has happened to us, and conferring a more exalted state of mind as it edifies. Such an effect will be produced in any age by Luther's translation of the Bible.

Had the *Nibelungenlied* been turned into smooth prose right from the start and made into a *Volksbuch*,¹⁷³ much might have been achieved; the strange, grave, dark and spooky mindset of the medieval knights would have spoken to us with its full force. Whether or not this is still advisable or even doable can best be assessed by those who have devoted themselves to such antiquarian pursuits.

A second epoch now follows in which there is a concern to transpose oneself into a foreign country but in fact only by adapting foreign notions to one's own particular perspective. I'd call such a period *parodistic* in the strict sense of the word.¹⁷⁴ It's usually men of wit who feel drawn to this kind of activity. The French avail themselves of this approach in translating all poetic works; hundreds of examples can be found in Delille's versions.¹⁷⁵ Just as the Frenchman makes foreign words palatable to himself, he proceeds in like manner with feelings, thoughts, even objects; for every exotic fruit he fashions a surrogate which has sprouted from his own native soil.

Wieland's translations are of this sort.¹⁷⁶ He had an odd sensibility and personal taste whereby he drew near to antiquity and to foreign lands only insofar as he felt comfortable there. This eminent man can be seen as a representative of his epoch. He had an extraordinary impact in that whatever delighted him, as well as the manner in which he assimilated and transmitted it, struck his contemporaries too as pleasant and enjoyable.

Because one cannot tarry for too long in either the complete or the incomplete but rather, one transformation must constantly follow upon another, we then came to experience the third era which can be reckoned the final as well as the highest. This is the era in which an attempt was launched to make the translation identical to the original, not in such a way that the translation supplants the original but rather stands in the same place.

At first this type met with the greatest resistance. For the translator who sticks closely to his original more or less abandons the originality of his own nation; and so a third element comes into being for which the public must gradually develop a taste.

Voß,¹⁷⁷ who cannot be too highly praised, couldn't please the public at first but then bit by bit learned to hear his new approach and to feel comfortable with it. Now whoever surveys what came to pass, what versatility appeared among the Germans; what rhetorical, rhythmic, metrical advantages now stand within the grasp of clever and talented young people; how Ariosto, Tasso, Shakespeare and Calderon have been brought before us as 'germanised' foreigners twice and even three times already – such a person may hope that literary history will state without hindrance who was the first person to carve out this path despite so many obstacles.

Von Hammer's works for the most part show a similar approach to Oriental masterpieces. His approximation of their outer form is especially commendable. The incomparably superior passages of his translation of Firdowsi (which the aforementioned friend gave us) are obvious when compared with those of an adaptor,¹⁷⁸ some of which can be read in the *Fundgruben*. We consider this manner of reconfiguring a poet to be one of the sorriest mistakes which an industrious and otherwise skilled translator could make.

But since those three eras return and repeat themselves in every literature – indeed, the three approaches can be in practice concurrently – a prose translation of the *Shah-nameh* and the works of Nizami would still have a place; it could be used for skimming the text for its general sense. We could enjoy the historical, the fabulous and the ethical aspects in a general way and gradually familiarise ourselves with the attitudes and modes of thought until we could finally be fully intimate with them.

We should keep in mind the very pronounced applause which we Germans accorded to such a translation of the *Shakuntala* and we could attribute the delight which it gave us to that very plain prose into which the poem had been dissolved.¹⁷⁹ Now, however, it is high time that we were given a translation of the third sort, which would correspond to the various dialects and the different rhythmic, metrical and prose styles of the original and which might make this poem in all its distinctive strangeness both freshly enjoyable and familiar to us. Since a manuscript of this immortal work is available in Paris, a German living there could win undying renown amongst us by taking this task on.

The English translator of the *Cloud Messenger*, the *Megadhuta*, is also deserving of all honour since a first encounter with a work of this sort marks a date in our lives forever.¹⁸⁰ In fact, his translation is really from the second era; it is periphrastic and supplementary; with its iambic pentameter it cajoles the north-eastern ear and mind. By contrast I am indebted to Kosegarten for a few verses taken directly from the original which, to be sure, permit a quite different interpretation.¹⁸¹ The Englishman was pleased to transpose motifs, which is something the well-schooled aesthetic eye discovers at once and disapproves.

We'll explain briefly why we term the third era the last one. A translation which tries to identify with the original comes close to an interlinear version in the end; it makes an understanding of the original much easier. We are led to the fundamental text – indeed, we are driven to it – and so at last the entire circle within which the approximation of the foreign and the domestic, the known and the unknown move, is drawn to a close.

FINAL CONCLUSION!

Cognoscenti and well-disposed friends will judge to what extent we have succeeded in linking the most ancient and remote Orient with the most recent and most living. Nevertheless, there has come into our hands of late something relevant to present day history which may serve happily enough as a lively and cheerful conclusion to the entire work.

When the Persian ambassador appointed to St. Petersburg received the assignments of his emperor, the monarch's illustrious consort didn't miss the opportunity; rather, for her part she despatched considerable gifts to Her Majesty the Empress, Mother of all the Russians, accompanied by a letter the translation of which we are delighted to impart.¹⁸²

LETTER

*From the Consort of the Emperor of Persia
To Her Majesty the Empress, Mother of all the Russians*

For as long as the elements endure out of which the world is composed may the illustrious wife of the Palace of Grandeur, the treasure-chest of the pearl of the realm, the constellation on the brow of majesty which bears the gleaming sun of the great kingdom, the sphere of the midpoint of the highest rule, the palm tree of the fruit of the utmost power, be ever happy and preserved from all misfortunes.

After having offered these my sincerest good wishes I have the honour to announce that in our fortunate times, through the action of the great compassion of the almighty Being, the gardens of the two supreme powers bring forth fresh rose blooms anew and that everything which has slipped in between the two royal courts has been set aside in the warmest unity and friendship; and henceforth, all those who are connected with one or the other of these courts will not cease to maintain friendly relations and exchanges of letters.

Now, therefore, in this moment when His Excellency Mirza Abul Hasan Khan, ambassador to the great Russian court, is en route to its capital, I have deemed it needful to open the doors of friendship with the key of this sincere letter. And because it is an ancient custom, in accord with the basic principles of friendship and cordiality, that friends offer gifts, I entreat you to be pleased to accept the jewellery of our country, which is offered with our warmest compliments. I do hope that in turn you will revive the garden of my heart – which loves you greatly – with some drops of a friendly missive. I ask then to be charged with tasks which I shall discharge to the full as they arise.

May God preserve your days pure, glad and renowned.

Gifts

One pearl necklace of 498 carats
Five Indian shawls
One small cardboard case of Isfahan handiwork
One little box for storing feathers
Receptacle for utensils for necessary use
Five pieces of brocade

*

We have already shown our fellow countrymen, in the course of our history of Persian literature and poetry, how the ambassador, while tarrying in St Petersburg, expresses himself on the circumstances of both nations both cleverly and modestly.

Recently, moreover, we find this same 'born ambassador', in transit to England, reached in Vienna by the gracious gifts of his emperor, upon which the ruler himself (in his poetical expression) wholly confers splendour and significance. We append these poems too as the ultimate capstone of our cathedral vault, composed out of numerous materials but – God willing! – built to last.

در درفش

فتحعلي شه ترك جمشيد كيتي افروز
كشور خدای ايران خورشيد عالم ارا
چترش بصحن كيهان افكنده ظل اعظم
كردش بمغز كيوان اكنده مشك سارا
ايران كنم شيران خورشيد شاه ايران
زانست شير و خورشيد نقش درفش دارا
فرق سفير دانا يعني ابو الحسن خان
بر اطلس فلك شود از اين درفش خارا
از مهر سوي لندن اورا سفير فرمود
زان داد فر و نصرت برخسرو نصارا

*The Banner*¹⁸³

Fath 'Ali Shah the Turk is like Jamshid,
Light of the world, Iran's lord, the sun of the earth.
His royal parasol casts wide shadows across the surface of the world.
His waistband breathes out musk to Saturn's brain.
Iran is a chasm of lions, its prince is the sun;
Thus, lion and sun glitter on the banner of Dara.

The silken banner raises to heaven on high
The head of the envoy Abul Hasan Khan.
Out of love was he despatched to London
And he brought health and happiness to the Christian lord.

*

در پرده با صورت شاه وافتاب

تبارك الله زاین پرده همایون فرّ
که افتاب بر پردکش پرده در
بلی طرازش از کلک مانی ثانی
نکار فتحعلی شاه افتاب افسر
مهین سفیر شهنشاه اسمان درگاه
ابو الحسن خان آن هوشمند دانشور
زیای تا سر او غرق کوهر از خسرو
سپرد چون ره خدمت بجای پا از سر
چو خواست باز کند تارکش قرین با مهر
قرانش داد بدین مهر اسمان چاکر
درین خجسته بشارت اشارتست بزرگ
بر ان سفیر نکو سیرت ستوده سیر
که هست عهدش عهد جهانکشا دارا
که هست قولش قول سپهر فرّ داور

*The Ribbon of the Order*¹⁸⁴

with the image of the Sun and the King

May God bless this ribbon with its noble gleam;
The sun draws the veil away from it.
Its adornment came from the second Mani's¹⁸⁵ brush,
The image of Fath 'Ali Shah crowned with the sun.
A grand envoy of the lord at the heaven's court
Is Abul Hasan Khan, learned and wise,
Immersed in lordly pearls from head to foot;
He strode the path of service from beginning to end.
Since it was desired to exalt his head to heaven
He was granted to serve the son of heaven.
Such glad embassy makes supreme sense
For so noble and renowned an ambassador;
His ribbon is the ribbon of world-conquering Dara,
His word is the word of the lord with its heavenly radiance.

Under the guise of a childish naivety, Oriental courts observe an especially clever and sly manner and procedure, of which the preceding poems are proof.

The latest Russian mission to Persia did find Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan at the court but not in the best favour; he comported himself with diffidence towards the mission, performed many services for them and earned their gratitude. A few years later the very same man was sent to England with a magnificent cortège; nevertheless, peculiar means were taken to glorify him properly. Upon departure he was not provided with all the perquisites due to him but was allowed to proceed on his way with his credentials and whatever else was required. Scarcely has he arrived in Vienna, however, when glittering confirmations of his worth, striking testimonials to his importance, rush upon him. A banner with the insignia of the kingdom is sent to him, a ribbon of the order adorned with the image of the sun – indeed, with the image of the emperor himself – all of which exalts him as a representative of the highest power: majesty is present with him and within him. But it doesn't end there; poems are added which in true Oriental style glorify banner, sun and image in dazzling metaphors and hyperboles.

To make the individual poems easier to understand we add a few remarks here. The Emperor calls himself a Turk, having sprung from the Turkish-speaking Qajar tribe. In fact, all the principal tribes of Persia which furnish the wartime army are divided according to language and origin into tribes speaking the Turkish, Kurdish, Lurian or Arabic languages.

He compares himself with Jamshid since Persians set their mighty princes alongside their ancient kings in respect to certain qualities: Feridun for dignity, Jamshid for splendour, Alexander for might, Darius for protection. The parasol is the emperor himself, God's shadow on earth, and certainly only he may avail himself of a parasol on hot summer days and yet, he doesn't shade himself alone but the whole world. The fragrance of musk, the finest, most lasting, most penetrating, rises from the emperor's girdle up to Saturn's brain. For them Saturn is the highest of the planets; its sphere encompasses the world below it. Here is the head, the brain of the ensemble; where the brain is, there are the senses, so that Saturn is also receptive to the odour of musk, which rises up from the emperor's waistband. *Dara* is the name of Darius and means 'ruler'. They never let the memory of their forefathers fall away. That Iran is called 'chasm of lions' strikes us as especially significant because that part of Persia where the court is usually in residence is extremely mountainous and so the kingdom can easily be imagined as a gorge populated by warriors, by lions. The silken banner explicitly exalts the ambassador to the highest possible level and an amiable and affectionate relation to England is thereby expressed.

For the second poem we can advance the general observation that the configurations of words in the Persian art of poetry impart a graceful, inner liveliness; they come forth frequently and delight us with their sensuous resonance.

The ribbon stands also for every sort of encirclement which has an entrance and for that very reason requires a door-keeper, as the original expresses it when it says, 'whose entrance-curtain (or door) the sun lifts up (opens)' for the door of many Oriental rooms forms a curtain; the keeper and lifter of the curtain is thus the door-keeper. By Mani is Manes meant, the head of the Manichean sect, who is supposed to have been a skilled painter and to have propagated his strange distorted teachings mainly through paintings. He appears here in the same way as we say Apelles and Raphael. At the words 'lordly pearls' the imagination is strangely stirred. Pearls also stand for drops and so 'a sea of pearls' is conceivable, into which a gracious majesty dips a favourite. When he pulls him out, the drops still cling to him and he is sumptuously bedecked from head to foot. But now the 'path of service' possesses head and foot, beginning and end, start and stop. The servant is to be praised and rewarded for treading this faithfully. The following lines reveal an intention to elevate the ambassador extravagantly and to secure for him the greatest trust at the court to which he has been sent, just as if the emperor himself were present there. From this we may conclude that the mission to England is of the highest importance.

It has been said of Persian poetic art, and quite rightly, that it stands fixed in an everlasting diastole and systole and the preceding poems confirm this view. It is forever heading out into the unbounded but then immediately heads back into the circumscribed. The ruler is the light of the world and at the same time the lord of his kingdom, the sunshade which shelters him from the sun spreads its shadow out over the whole world, the sweet smell of his waistband is discernible even to Saturn, and so on and on it all strives without and within, from the most fabulous epochs to the passing day of the present court. From this we learn that the tropes, metaphors and hyperboles are never to be taken individually but only in the sense and context of the All.

REVIEW

If we consider the part which has been accorded to written transmission from the earliest times up to the present, this is very much enlivened by the fact that on those parchments and folios there has always been something to improve and correct. If it were possible for an unknown and error-free copy to be put into our hands, it would very probably be quickly set aside.

It cannot be denied as well that we personally forgive many an error in a book inasmuch as we feel flattered at having discovered them. May this human characteristic stand our printed book in good stead as well, for to correct various defects and set right many errors remains for us or for others to undertake in the future. Even so, a little note here won't be rudely rebuffed.

First of all mention must be made of the transcription of Oriental names, for which a thorough-going uniformity is scarcely attainable. For given the huge differences between eastern and western languages it is hard to find clear equivalents in our languages for those alphabets. Furthermore, since European languages themselves place differing value and significance on their particular alphabet as a result of their various origins and dialects, any sort of general agreement becomes even harder.

We've been led into these regions principally under French escort. Herbelot's dictionary came as an answer to our prayers.¹⁸⁶ The French scholar had to appropriate Oriental words and names according to the ways in which natives pronounced and heard them and make them pleasing so that they then gradually passed into German culture. Hence we say 'Hegire' instead of 'Hedschra' because of its pleasant sound as well as its long-standing familiarity.¹⁸⁷

How much the English have accomplished for their part! Though they aren't unanimous about the pronunciation of their own idiom, still they reserve the right, as is only proper, to pronounce and write those names in their own fashion whereas we waver and fall all too often into uncertainty.

The Germans, for whom it is easiest to write as they speak, who are not reluctant to assimilate foreign sounds, quantities and accents, got down to serious work. But just because they were anxious to come ever closer to what is foreign and exotic, here too we find a big difference between older writings and more recent ones, with the result that there is scarcely any compelling reason to submit to some sure authority.

My friend J.G.L. Kosegarten, as perceptive as he is genial (and to whom I am indebted for the translation of the royal poems above) has amiably relieved me of this concern; he has conveyed corrections, included in the Register where a few misprints still occur.¹⁸⁸ May this trustworthy man be disposed to favour my preparation of a future *Divan* in the same manner.

To our Master, go! Pledge
Yourself, O little book, snug-serene;
Here at the beginning, here at the end,
Alpha and Omega, East and West.

*

سيلويستر دساي

يا ايها الكتاب سر الي سيدنا الاعز
فسلم عليه بهذه الورقة
التي هي اول الكتاب واخره
يعني اوله في المشرق واخره في المغرب
ما نصيحت بجاي خود كرديم
روزكاري درين بسر برديم
كر نياید بکوش رغبت کس
بر رسولان پیام باشد وبس

We've uttered good counsel now
And devoted much of our days to that;
If it sounds discordant to the human ear –
Well, a messenger's duty is to speak. Enough!¹⁹⁰

POEMS COLLECTED POSTHUMOUSLY

*

†

191

That I pay to seduce, that goes in the West, that goes in the East. That I pay to lose, that, I would think, is a very bad price.

192

One day I had to pass through Erfurt where once I'd walked so often and to me it seemed that after many years, I was well received and well liked.

When old women greeted the old man gleefully from their market stalls, I seemed to see the days of my youth again when we sweetened each other's lives.

One was a baker's daughter, another a cobbler; the first one was no owl,¹ the other knew well how to live.

And so we wanted constantly to rival Hafiz: to take delight in the present, and savour the past together.

193²

Vision

I have a nice little house and concealed inside I am tucked in quite comfortably from the glare of the sun.
For since there are tiny doors, cushions and windows, I feel so good by myself as if I were with pretty girls.
And – O wonderful! – the forests rear up for my delight; the far-off fields come close to my breast.
So the forested mountains dance alongside as well; all that is missing is the shriek of pleasure from excited dwarves.
And yet, it runs past me so wholly mute and still, mostly straight but often twisty too, and I like it better that way.
If I consider it aright and ponder it seriously, maybe everything else is standing still and I alone am travelling.

*

194

There Jesus too may teach the low-lives of paradise; who will stand up for his apostles so they say what they think?

There heavenly female natures stroll in the breezy groves; at evening they are always whores but at daybreak, virgins again.³

There too the Mother of God,⁴ who bore a son, and despite Satan's mockery, did not lose at $x + y$.⁵

The Queen of Heaven too

Because she bore a son is revered as a virgin.

*

195

Fragments

That the house's splendour may increase as an everlasting possession and the son hold fast to honour as his father did to glory.

In your songs, O Hafiz, I hear you praising the poets. See, I will give you my reply: Magnificent is he who has exalted thankfulness!

196

when everyone is speaking
No one can be heard for sure

If I peer out of the carriage at someone there, he right away makes something of it; he thinks that I'm greeting him silently. And he's right.

No one ought to praise such bonds but he who feels himself free of bonds; and he who disports gaily in the absurd, well, the absurd will befit him too.

And this is how it went for Hafiz too who was, even so, the most gifted.

And there a man was dragging himself along on his knees.⁶

197

Don't trust the wise man when he's drunk for he'll steal your secret from you.

When you hear this, revere it as ancient, the world: many years have since flowed over the mountains and the valleys and many more will flow over them.

*

198

Should I not make use of a simile as I am inclined to do? Since God gives us a likeness of life in the gnat.⁷

199

Should I not make use of a simile as I am inclined to do? Since God gives me a likeness of Himself in the Beloved's eyes.

200

And in the dialect of the Alemanni⁸ to outdo even the Persians.

*

201

Downfall of the Zund Dynasty

Uli Khan sat on the terrace and received reports that a warrior-people was approaching from Mazanderan. Report followed report.

Uli Khan hurried to Kerman to put an end to the war. Have all of you forgotten, Ibrahim,⁹ that I once called you father? Report followed report.

Uli Khan, the highly revered, must bring his wife and his children to Tabas

202

And our tent-stakes dislodge the gazelles.

He who wants pearls must plunge into the sea.

—

—

—

203

Europe's register of state¹⁰ is big but the number of its supporters is small

Do you know then what the beloved is called? Do you know which wine I praise?

Less cools off the belly and too much inflames the head.

Do not follow liars and hypocrites in order that you may flatter them; they will become your flatterers.¹¹

204

Dou-Rouy

And you are like the hortensias, now green, then red, now blue; at the end quite miscoloured. I know you perfectly.

205

Khalkhal

(Anklet)

The jingling ring around your ankle – you dissolute women – that does not entice me.

206¹²

The condition is strict nevertheless that they never overstep; they keep quiet about the harshness that their Lord suffered so
That they too have been often jostled aside as the evil hangman's prey, they say that nothing happened and so they are lovely folk
When we come into the final realm with the luscious heavenly feast we'll stretch out and settle down. Hooray, we are at home!

207

It is most strictly required that they never overstep; that they most rigorously keep silent about the suffering of their Lord So that dusted with a fresh broom, and
their Lord the hangman's prey, they act as if nothing had happened; and so they are really nice folk.

*

†

They go, the head adorned with finery

For in Paradise you must present yourself as much more than human.

Do not give your heart away to him whom a thousand people love

The letter of parting already written



Marrow lies hidden in every bone and in every shirt lies hidden a man

This Wine from Isfahan

Wine cannot sit well with you; no physician has allowed it for you. A little only discomforts your stomach but too much enflames your head.



*

The consecrated progeny of Abraham take pleasure in aggressive bargaining; I see them haggling in the bazaar, they buy cheaply but they sell well.

And now the greatest hilarity breaks out amongst all the mockers of astrology, as they are most commonly found at court; they mock; the prince is enraged at the lordly minion; wherever he goes, wherever he turns, he sees himself mocked, mortified and shamed; rage pelts him with stones. One only, a noble, acknowledges the talent and not in the heavy rare moments he hides, surrounded by the safest of protections. And still, messenger after messenger from that place ... is reporting¹³

Wherever enlightened people assemble, there alone is wisdom perceived. So the Queen of Saba¹⁴ once provided an instance of a higher understanding.

She had set before Solomon a golden vase, alongside other treasures, large and rich in extravagant ornamentation, with fish and birds and forest beasts, around which scalloped flourishes swarmed, like Jachin and Boaz of the twin pillars.¹⁵

Should a servant be clumsy enough to cause a nasty dent in it, it was repaired in a flash. Even so, a discerning eye could spot the damage and delight and joy were undone.

The king spoke: Just as I thought! The sublimest things that are given to us are spoiled right away by an ugly blemish. The devils,¹⁶ who hate us, can never allow perfection to be perfect.

[Eilfer]¹⁷

[*First Version*]

Everywhere, where one wants to treat me well, it's with a bottle of Eilfer; on the Rhine, the Main, and the Neckar, smiling Eilfer is served. But you hear even benevolent names repeated like Eilfer; for example, Frederick the Great as predominant Eilfer, and Kant¹⁸ is named again and again as exhilarating Eilfer. In silence I name many a name as Eilfer. They speak too of my songs with jubilant praise as of Eilfer. Everyone drinks of my wine, clinking glasses in purest Eilfer. This would make me even happier, even more than the Eilfer, if only Hafiz could drink some too. Worthy man, drink the Eilfer! I hurry down to Hades where the sober souls drink no Eilfer, I speak of the Eilfer! Hurry, Hafiz, go! Up above there stands a glass full of Eilfer, that a most generous friend¹⁹ had set aside so that I might lavishly enjoy the consummate Eilfer. But, Hafiz, hurry! For I stand surety until you slurp Eilfer on the bright side of the Rheingau, where Eilfer is in its full glory, while I'm on the nighttime side: here shivers one accustomed to Eilfer. – Come back, O Thoughtful Man, made thoughtless by Eilfer, that I may greet you as an ancestor, still breathing out Eilfer! When I come back my lady friend strives with me: 'Has the Eilfer yet again capsized you! Drunk on Eilfer you lay insensitive to my caresses, as though the Eilfer were comparable to my kisses. Stay away from the Eilfer!' But she doesn't know that you, O Hafiz, had sipped up the Eilfer in my place while I lay senseless there out of love for you!



Only Eilfer has done all that and committed the crime, innocent Eilfer! But the sweetheart says, 'I'm jealous of this rival – the Eilfer's cup-bearer – as of the ever ready Eilfer of the dark-eyed cup-bearer, Hatem! Look me in the eye! Get rid of the cup-bearer and the Eilfer! These kisses are here and now, where will the Eilfer lead!'

.....²⁰

For I'd like only too well to drink the Eilfer when it has aged, for the current vintage of Eilfer's all too rough and young. I want never to dispense with Eilfer all my life long that grew so abundantly and well *Anno Eilf*.²¹ That's why it's called Eilfer.



Sing me yet another song of the Eilfer! For I sang it in the drunkenness of love, and drunken on Eilfer.

213

[*Eilfer*]

[*Second Version*]²²

Wherever one wants to treat me well, it's with a bottle of Eilfer. At Rhine and Main, in the Neckar Valley, they serve me smiling Eilfer. And many an outstanding man is invoked less often than Eilfer. Humanity may have done well and yet, it's still no Eilfer. They call princes good almost as they do Eilfer; if their exploits gladden us, we toast them high with Eilfer. And many a name I mutter low while silently downing my Eilfer: she knows it, if no one else does, that Eilfer tastes best to me. They speak of my songs in praise almost as much as of Eilfer, and they pluck off flowers and branches to crown both me and the Eilfer. But all this would be an even greater boon – I'm happy to share my Eilfer – if only Hafiz could have his share and guzzle down some Eilfer. That's why I hurry up to paradise where sadly the faithful never drink an Eilfer. However sweet is the wine of heaven, it certainly isn't Eilfer! Hurry up, Hafiz, come running here! A Roman glass²³ of Eilfer is waiting here for you!

214

My heart demands that I open it to you. Would that I heard from yours! It demands it of me. How sadly the world looks at me.

In my mind there dwells only my friend and no other, not a trace of an enemy. Like candles at morning a resolve has come upon me:

From now on I will make his love my life's business. I think of him. My heart bleeds.

I have no other strength but to love him so justly in stillness. What will come of that? I want to embrace him and I cannot.

215

So sad that in days of war men beat each other to death; in peace-time the same misery prevails: the women whack you dead with their tongues.

216

Let me weep! surrounded by night, in a wasteland without end. The camels are at rest, the camel-drivers too. The Armenian²⁴ calculates while he silently keeps watch, but I by his side count the miles that separate me from Suleika. I go over the vexing, angry curves that lengthen the road. Let me weep! That is no shame. Men who weep are good.²⁵ Didn't Achilles weep for his Briseïs!²⁶ Xerxes wept for his unvanquished army; Alexander wept for the beloved he himself had slain.²⁷ Let me weep! Tears give life to the dust. Already it turns green.²⁸

No longer on pages of silk do I write symmetrical rhymes. No longer do I compose them in rows of gold. Inscribed in the shifting dust, the wind blows them away and yet, their force remains anchored to the ground, to the very centre of the earth. And the wanderer will come, the lover. If he treads on this spot, he will tremble in all his limbs, 'Here! before me some lover loved. Was it Majnun the tender? Farhad the mighty? Jamil who kept faith? Or one of those thousands of happy-unhappy lovers? He loved! Like him I love, I recognise him!'

But Suleika, you rest on the downy cushion I prepared and adorned for you. You too would feel his voice tingle through all your limbs. 'It is he who calls me, Hatem. And I too call you, O Hatem! Hatem!'

*

[*Two Versions*]

An egg lies there It is no egg No The Above Below it is so lumpy It is without any proportion It is a bundle Boy, strike the bundle! You, boy, hit it The boy strikes, the bundle blows open Another strikes it and gaping wider the bundle terrifies the lords and heroes Shah Dudan springs from his horse impetuously and pokes his spur in such a way that the cake pops out a mighty child, strongly developed with all too powerful limbs

An egg lies there It is no egg No! Above Below it is so lumpy is without proportion, it is a magic bundle It has a motion it has a life Strike it, boys, shatter the shell A boy strikes, the bundle blows open Now another strikes and gaping, it grows. Nobody wants to get close to the magic but 'Ali Kashan climbs down from his horse He puts his spur into the growth Then a strong child, fully developed, pops and rips it

*

219

Hafiz, to put myself on a par with you, what craziness! On the waves of the sea a ship steers its course straight on, it feels its sails swell, it wanders bold and proud; if the ocean means to smash it, it swims on with worm-eaten wood. In your songs, light and swift, a cool current undulates, it seethes up to waves of fire; the blaze devours me. And yet, an arrogance will swell that lends me audacity: I too have lived, have loved, in a country ablaze with sun!³⁰

220

Black shadow lies over the dust of the beloved companion; I turned myself into dust but the shadow passed over me.³¹

221

So tell me then how should I wind it. Each social class wears it in its own way.³²

He who knows himself, knows his God.³³

I like the way your hand feels on my head and anyone can see that I belong to you: that, Darling, is my place.³⁴

Speak! Under what sign of heaven does the day stand, where my heart that is my very own, no longer takes its flight? And were it to fly, would it lie quite close for me to attain? On the cushion, sweet and soft, where my heart lies by yours.

And why does the captain of cavalry not send his couriers day after day? He has horses and he knows how to write.

Indeed, he can write in *taliq* and he knows how to write elegant *naskhi* too on pages of silk. His writing would stand in his place for me.

The sick person doesn't want, doesn't want to get well from the sweet suffering; she, becoming well with news from her beloved, sickens.

مَقْبُولُ السُّلْطَانِ مَسْعُودٌ
وَمَبْغُوضُ الْخَاقَانِ مَرْدُودٌ

'Whoever finds favour with the Sultan is fortunate but whoever is hated by the Khan is driven out.'³⁷

If he writes in *naskhi* he speaks of his faithfulness; if he writes in *taliq*, that is quite a delight, one form or another – It's enough: he loves.³⁸

*

226

All things announce you, should the splendid sun appear, you come – soon, as I hope. Should you step forth into the garden, you are the rose of roses, the lily of lilies altogether. If you sing to the heavenly vault, the stars at once start to ring with you and all around you! Night! and were it then night you would outshine the moon's dear enticing glow. Dear and enticing are you! And flowers, moon and stars revere only you, O Sun! The creator of splendid days.

It is life and eternity.

13 March, evening 10 o'clock
In the Year of the Worlds II. 163.5.8

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227³⁹

Sweet child, these pearl necklaces, if I can only manage it, I want to give you faithfully, as wicks for the lamp of love.

And now you come, you have a sign hanging at your throat that of all the signs of Abraxas⁴⁰ and his like, is the most displeasing to me.

You may take this quite modern folly to Shiraz! Should I really sing in its rigidity one stick laid across another?⁴¹

He chose Abraham, lord of the stars, as his ancestor; Moses, in the desert distance, who became great through the One.

David too, through many a failing, indeed many a crime, could yet redeem himself: I have well served the *only* God.

Jesus was pure in feeling and contemplated only one God in stillness; whoever made him a god himself offended his holy will.

*

And so it must be reckoned true what Muhammad accomplished as well. He compelled the whole world solely through the idea of God's oneness.
If even so, you demand reverence for this wretched thing, let it serve as my excuse that you're not alone in sporting it.
And yet, you are alone! Just as Solomon's many wives converted him to gaze on goddesses and pray to those whom these half-wits revered.
The cow-horn of Isis, Anubis's dog-maw they offered up to Jewish pride; do you really want me to make a god of such a lamentable image of wood!
And I don't want to make myself seem better than the situation warrants; Solomon abjured his god and I've denied mine too.

Let my renegade's status be absolved in this kiss: even Huitzilopochtli⁴² could be a talisman on your heart

Redacted
Wiesbaden on the longest day 1818

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†

در اقصای عالم بکشتم بسر بُردم ایام با هر کسی
تمتع زهر کوشه یافتم
چه این شهر و نسوان حوری نژاد
چه خوش گفت

228

You have taught me not merely as Qabus,⁴³ you have also given me wisdom as Oguz;⁴⁴ now as Hoja you allow me to figure out just how Hoja⁴⁵ could have accompanied Timur's might.

229

I have travelled through many lands, I have seen crowds of men everywhere, I have even remembered the nooks, each blade of grass has given me grain. Blessed City, its like never seen, houris upon houris, bride after bride! ⁴⁶

*

230

There is no need for friendship with the Germans. To the sharpest hostility courtesy is mine to command. The sweeter they show themselves, the more I feel menaced afresh. I don't let myself be annoyed by a dreary dawn or a dusk; let the waters flow on, flow on for joy and pain. But despite all this, I remained in command of myself. All of them wanted to savour whatever the hour held out. I haven't reproached them. Everyone has his own pain. They all give me greeting and they hate me to the death.⁴⁷

231

You are musk! Wherever you have been one is always aware of you.

232

You are magnificent as musk: wherever you have been one is aware of your presence still.

233

On what wine did Alexander get soused? I'd wager my last breath of life: it wasn't as good as mine.

234

They've tried for a full fifty years to unmake me, remake me, mismake me; I'd have thought you could understand what you're worth within the boundaries of the Fatherland. In your time you stormed with wild young gangs, endowed with demonic genius, then ever so gently you drew near, year after year, to wise men, divinely-mild.

235

Hatem and Suleika

Hudhud spoke: With one glance she confided all to me and I am always instructed by your happiness, as I was. For you love then! In the nights of separation see how it's written in the stars; that, allied with eternal powers, your love remains lustrous and rich.

236

Hudhud on the little palm-branch, here in the corner, nests with flirtatious looks, how charming! And he is ever vigilant.

237

Hudhud Explains an Enigmatic Passage

The painter takes risks with images of gods; he has realised his loftiest; but what he finds impossible is to describe the beloved to a lover. Let him give it a try as well! A dream will serve, a silhouette will be quite welcome.

238

Hudhud as a Messenger with an Invitation

My song once made you happy; now it would like to press towards you in the distance. I sing the morning and evening all through; they say: Better! I like to hear that. If a letter comes from time to time to bring you a greeting, don't be disturbed! But is Baghdad really so far? Don't you want to listen to me again at all?

*

239

Hudhud Asks for a New Year's Gift in a Riddle

It is a tool needed every day, less by men, by women more; for most faithful service quite prepared and docile; many in one, pointed and sharp; its play is gladly repeated whereby we make ourselves presentable: outwardly slick when inwardly we suffer. But play and good grooming only refresh us anew, if the tool has first received its proper consecration.⁴⁸

Dec. 1819

240

The gift is beautiful and costly; the request well deciphered; but whether it's had its consecration remains uncertain.

Could that not be set right again? What *he* most decorously did not purloin, but if *she* would now permit it herself!! Hudhud, go and tell her this.⁴⁹

241

Alas, I can't answer her as much as it would please me to do so; may my poems be enough for you, and my heart and my fidelity.

242

Whoever knows himself and others will recognise this too: Orient and Occident are no longer to be separated.

243

To rock oneself intelligently between both worlds – I count that good; and so to move between East and West is for the best!⁵⁰

244

The West like the East gives you pure things to taste. Leave off caprices, leave the husk, sit down at the great feast: Even in passing through you won't want to forgo this dish.⁵¹

245

Yet again! To taste old and new song for the first time in the East!